

Imports from India continue unabated

KARACHI: As Pakistan's exports to India face suspension after Pulwama attack on Feb 14, the trading and import of Indian goods, on the other hand, has so far been moving at normal pace.

Some businessmen, however, want a "tit-for-tat action" from Pakistani government in view of up to 200 per cent duty imposed by India on import of Pakistani goods.

Sources said that exports of cement, gypsum and dry dates from Wagah Border have come to a halt from Sunday as importers on the Indian side refuse to purchase goods following up to 200pc duty imposed by their government. But imports of cotton and PSF yarn, plastic molding compound (PMC) etc continue to arrive from India through Wagah Border.

Pakistan has already banned imports of tomato and potato from India for the last two years in fear of disease.

A random visit to Jodia Bazaar and Marriot Road, the country's hub of imported commodities, revealed that traders continue to display Indian products like artificial jewellery, cosmetics etc more prominently at their shops claiming that "consumers have not shown any sign to halt Indian goods' purchase after tensions escalated between the two countries."

Traders said Indian jewellery is easily available at markets while there has been no suspension in their imports so far after Pulwama attack. Artificial jewellery has been arriving without any interruption from Dubai or directly from India, they claimed. They said that the ongoing war of words between the two governments has not had any impact on prices.

A leading trader and former president of Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Haroon Agar, who imports cumin seed, copra, coriander seed, peanuts, big cardamom, glucose, chemicals etc from the neighboring country said, "import trade with India has been going normal so far after Pulwama attack."

"I think that thriving imports from India should be curbed in retaliation of the duty imposed on Pakistani goods," he said adding that the "our government should take a firm stand by imposing heavy regulatory duty on Indian goods as well. Traders and businessmen would follow our government's decision in any case."

President Sindh Industrial Trading Estate Association of Industry Saleem Parekh said that "it is time for Pakistan to react. I mean tit-for-tat by imposing heavy duties on Indian goods."

"There should also be a check and balance as a sizable volume of Indian goods is finding its way into Pakistan through Dubai," he said referring to imports of biscuits, food items, jewellery, clothes, cosmetics etc.

Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry Standing Committee on Plastic and Plastic Products Convener Ehteshamuddin said traders and industrialists are now worried as they are reluctant to open fresh letters of credits for import of PMC from India. Pakistan imports around 100,000-125,000 tonnes on PMC from India every year.

He said the market is abuzz with reports that the government may also decide to raise the duty on import of Indian goods. "Whatever step the government is planning for Indian items' import, we are with our government," he added.

Pakistan's exports to India during the last fiscal year totalled to \$484 million against imports of about \$1.8 billion.

It has been noted that most of the trade bodies and associations have remained silent and chosen not to react to India's decision to impose 200pc import duty on Pakistani goods as a number of industries procure their raw material from the eastern neighbour.

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