

Industrialists, traders demand thorough probe into Keamari tragedy

KARACHI: Industrialists and traders alike have expressed deep concerns over playing politics over Keamari incident as it hurts business and economic activities of the country and demanded thorough investigation of the incident.

President Karachi Chamber of Commerce & Industry (KCCI), Agha Shahab Ahmed Khan has said that everyone, including the federal, provincial and local governments, is doing politics over the Keamari incident which must stop as it is actually hurting the economic & business activities of Karachi and Pakistan.

"Any disruption in the activities at Karachi Port Trust (KPT) would obviously have a deep negative impact on the overall economic performance of Karachi as this port contributes the highest revenue to the national exchequer as compared to other ports," he added.

Agha Shahab, while expressing deep grief and sorrow over the sad demise of 14 people who died of suffocation in this incident, stressed that instead of doing politics over dead bodies of innocent people, a thorough investigation must be initiated and whosoever is responsible must be strictly punished.

He said that although it is widely being claimed since yesterday that it was caused by soybean dust from a particular shipment but it is highly unlikely as around 25 consignments arrive at KPT each year and no such incident has ever been reported. "Shifting the suspicious consignment to Port Qasim is not the solution hence there is a dire need to carry out a detailed forensic investigation and truth must emerge while the actual culprits responsible for this disaster must be strictly taken to task," he added.

He pointed out that it is a well-known fact that land grabbers are actively carrying out their illegal activities in the localities near Karachi port hence, the investigators will have to seriously examine whether this conspiracy has been hatched by such elements to achieve their nefarious goals.

President KCCI, while expressing deep sympathies with bereaved families, who lost their loved ones in this tragic incident, stressed that any negligence either by port authorities, shipping lines or any other department must be strictly dealt with and if any culprit or the elements from land mafia are found responsible for the disaster, they must be given exemplary punishment.

He also urged all the political parties at the federal, provincial and local governments to refrain from shinning their politics over the tragic Keamari incident, jointly carry out forensic investigation and devise an effective strategy to avoid such incidents in future. "KPT is an important port for the business and industrial community of entire Pakistan hence, strategies have to be defined on war footing basis to ensure uninterrupted working at this crucial port," he added.

Patron-in-Chief of United Business Group (UBG) and former President FPCCI S M Muneer and Secretary General Zubair Tufail have said that the question is how such toxic gas spread in the area.

They demanded that the incident should be investigated thoroughly as how this gas is emitted and how it has been spread in the area.

The area authorities should take measures to prevent such incidents in the future and also prepare plans as the safety of the lives of the citizens is essential.

They expressed concern over the loss of 14 precious human lives and hundreds of civilians affected by the outbreak of mysterious poison gas in the Keamari area. There is an air of mourning throughout the country over the loss of 14 lives in the incident.

They urged the Chief Minister to provide the best treatment to the people affected by the poisonous gas. They extend their condolences to the families of the victims.

Former Vice President of FPCCI and Former Chairman of Pakistan Ships Agents Association, Taqi Halim said that we should investigate the true nature of this incident considering the ground realities rather than getting involved in rumour mongering or speculation.

He condemned the rumours that are circulating targeting Soybean cargo which was being discharged partly at Karachi Port Trust at berth no. 10/11 east wharf.

It may be noted that cargo was discharged only during night of Sunday 16th February, 2020 (discharging commenced at 19:00 hours) and day of Monday 17th February, 2020 (discharging stopped at about 22:00 hours). Total of more than 600 labour worked on the ship none of them have been affected.

This cargo has been arriving at Karachi Port since the last many years and up till now not a single incident has occurred or has been reported.

When the cargo was being discharged the wind direction was North East (NE) which means that it was towards Manora direction not towards land.

We wish to also point out that the first person who was hospitalised was before the ship commenced discharging. This cargo is used to make edible oil it is an agricultural commodity and does not have chemicals in it.

Plant Protection Department visited the ship on 18th February, 2020 with gas detectors to check for any harmful or toxic gases. No gases were detected. He recommended that this ship should not be shifted and cargo should be discharged at Karachi Port only.

He confirmed that we along with labour force of about two to three thousand will stay at Karachi Port Trust berth during discharging operations. We must have the courage of our convictions, he added.