

## **Cargo truckers join transporters strike; port congestion feared**

KARACHI Cargo transporters on Tuesday joined truckers' strike over restrictions in axle load and imposing of hefty fine on traffic violation, at both the ports in Karachi, threatening to paralyse ports activities through piling up trade cargoes.

Officials of Customs Bonded Carriers Association (CBCA) and Transporters of Goods Association (TGA) said they also joined the transporters' strike and "internal transportation of goods at ports (movement of cargo from ships to terminals) had stopped".

Shams Burney of Bonded Carriers Association said the impact on ports would be visible in a couple of days "if the strike continued".

"For now, things are almost normal at the ports, but there will be congestion in a couple of days, if the removal of the cargo is not restored." An official at Qasim International Container Terminal (QICT) confirmed that containers are piling up at the terminal.

"Situation would get worse if strike continued, and it would take significant amount of time to clear the terminals even after the strike is called off," the official said.

Traders in Karachi estimate millions of dollars worth of only perishable goods will be stranded by the strike.

Shakoor Alam, a transporter, said empty vehicles are moving in between sheds at both the ports, and "there is no transportation of cargo outside the port area".

"Ships are coming and transporters are on strike, there will be severe shortage of space at ports and terminals in next two days."

An importer at Karachi's Gul Plaza said cargoes were transported on Tuesday, but truckers had informed the market that there would be no deliveries on Wednesday. Transporters have stopped goods supply from January 6 after they failed to convince the authorities to take action on their grievances.

"We are pressing for the solution of three main issues including unfair restrictions in axle load, hefty fines by the motorway police, and non-acceptance of provincial licenses by the motorway police," said Ghulam Muhammad Afridi, general secretary of Goods Carrier Association.

He said a 22-wheeler vehicle is allowed to carry 58.5 tons as per law, however the new axle load regime had restricted this limit to 32 tons for being triple-axle vehicle. "On the other hand industry wants us to carry 100 tons on a 22-wheeler to save their costs,"

Afridi added. The federal government had recently approved revised rates of fines against traffic violations on highways. The penalty, which was Rs750 on every kind of violation, is now being categorised. For speeding, the fine would be Rs1,500 for motorbikes, Rs2,500 for cars, Rs5,000 for trucks, and Rs10,000 for public service vehicles.

On the other hand, the Motorway Police is of the view that higher penalties on traffic violations were resulting in safer roads and lesser violations by the heavy traffic which most of the time caused fatal accidents.

Moreover, the Motorway Police has refused to accept truck/trailer drivers' licenses issued by the provincial authorities.

"Motorway Police only accepts motorway license and there is only one motorway licensing office, in Sheikhpura. There are over 600,000 drivers, which cannot be accommodated by just one office," Afridi said.