

Strike hits port activity in Karachi

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KARACHI: Operations at South Asia Pakistan Terminal (SAPT) came to a standstill late Monday evening after a workers' union went on strike demanding restoration of sacked workers and a raise in salary.

The entire port area, including Karachi port and deep water port where the private terminal (SAPT) is located near Keamari, was jammed with traffic the whole day on Tuesday.

Normal operations of other terminals and the entire Karachi port activity was paralysed as heavy vehicles clogged the entire port area starting from Keamari, ICI Bridge up to Northern Bypass.

The SAPT is operated by Hutchison Ports, Hong Kong since the Karachi Port Trust (KPT) gave the terminal on lease. The terminal workers forcefully disrupted normal operations late Monday evening when a container vessel, 'Tolten' of Hapag Lloyd took berth.

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It may be recalled that the same vessel, "Tolten" in March this year collided with another stationary vessel when it was being given berth alongside the SAPT terminal.

The terminal operator (SAPT) a couple of months ago took disciplinary action against four workers and sacked them, but these workers on Monday after entering the port area, disrupted the operations and other workers also joined them, SAPT sources said.

Terminal management worked through the day to sort the issue but the workers were not ready to oblige, insisting that all the sacked workers be reinstated and also insisted for the acceptance of their charter of demand.

According to a spokesman for the terminal, the workers also claimed that they have a court order for reinstating the workers but no copy of the order was made available to the officials of SAPT.

General Manager SAPT, Capt S Rashid Jamil finally managed to hold negotiations with the agitating workers and the issue was amicable resolved around 4 pm.

Under an understanding the SAPT immediately reinstated all the four workers as well 4-5 workers belonging to a contractor. With regard to charter of demand seeking raise in pay the workers were assured it would be considered in next financial year, SAPT sources said.

A spokeswoman for the SAPT, Ms Saira Khan, told Dawn that the terminal operator would not make any extra charges against delays and all the importers and exporters will be facilitated.

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