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TMA welcomes PM's directive to simplify exports, cut red tape

KARACHI: Chairman of the Towel Manufacturers' Association of Pakistan (TMA), Ather Bari, has welcomed Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's directives to simplify export procedures, reduce red tape, promote value addition, strengthen quality standards, enhance digitalization and improve Pakistan's competitiveness in international markets.

Ather Bari said the Prime Minister's emphasis on export growth and facilitation is encouraging and comes at an important time when Pakistan's export-oriented industries are facing significant challenges in maintaining their international competitiveness.

He said that Pakistan's towel and home textile industry is fully export-oriented and has considerable potential to increase foreign exchange earnings, employment and industrial growth. However, exporters are currently confronted with high energy costs, a heavy and complicated tax burden, delayed refunds, expensive logistics and regulatory difficulties, all of which increase the cost of production and weaken Pakistan's position in international markets.

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“The Prime Minister has rightly emphasized the need to reduce red tape and make export procedures faster, simpler and more transparent. The real requirement now is to ensure that these directives are translated into visible and practical improvements at the operational level,” Ather Bari stated.

He particularly highlighted the issue of high energy costs, saying that electricity and other utility charges have become a major component of the cost of production for export-oriented industries. Pakistani exporters are competing with producers from countries where industries benefit from more competitive and predictable energy costs.

“We cannot expect our exporters to compete globally if the cost of producing goods in Pakistan remains significantly higher. Competitive energy is not a concession; it is a fundamental requirement for export competitiveness,” he said.

Ather Bari also called for rationalization of the overall tax burden on export-oriented industries. He said exporters are willing to meet their legitimate tax obligations, but multiple taxes, advance taxes, withholding taxes and other levies, combined with delays in refunds, create a serious working-capital burden.

He emphasized that tax refunds must be processed through a clearly defined, time-bound and reliable mechanism. Delayed refunds tie up exporters’ working capital, increase financing costs and ultimately affect their ability to offer competitive prices to international buyers.

Ather Bari further stressed the need for a fundamental improvement in the attitude and working procedures of government institutions dealing with exporters.

“Government departments should function as facilitators of economic activity. Exporters should not have to make repeated visits, submit unnecessary documents or face avoidable delays for matters that can be resolved through transparent procedures and digital systems,” he said.

He welcomed the Prime Minister’s focus on digitalization and proposed that export-related regulatory processes should be made fully integrated, transparent, time-bound and digitally trackable, with clearly designated focal persons and accountability for delays.

He also emphasized that the restructured Export Development Fund (EDF) should be utilized effectively for genuine export promotion, including international exhibitions, market development, trade missions, branding, product development and sector-specific initiatives aimed at increasing Pakistan’s global market share.

He said that Pakistan’s exporters have already demonstrated their ability to compete internationally despite a challenging domestic business environment.

“Our exporters know how to compete and have established Pakistani products in demanding international markets. What we need now is a competitive cost structure, predictable policies, timely refunds and genuinely facilitative government institutions.”

Ather Bari urged the Government to convert the Prime Minister’s directives into a time-bound Export Facilitation Action Plan, with measurable targets covering energy costs, taxation, refunds, regulatory procedures, logistics, digitalization and market access.—PR