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Port & customs-related issues

APTMA seeks setting up of task force



The All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA) has sought the establishment of an emergency task force — comprising the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), the Ministry of Commerce, the Ministry of Finance and representatives of APTMA and the broader trade community — to resolve port and customs-related issues within 30 days, warning that exporters are losing orders daily due to delays at ports.

In a letter addressed to the Adviser to the Prime Minister, Dr. Syed Tauqeer Hussain Shah, APTMA Chairman Kamran Arshad drew the Prime Minister's immediate attention to what he described as a deeply alarming and rapidly deteriorating situation at ports and customs authorities. He said systemic bottlenecks are severely damaging Pakistan's industrial competitiveness, raising the cost of doing business to unsustainable levels, and jeopardizing the country's hard-won export growth trajectory.

Pakistan's textile and apparel sector—the country's largest export-oriented industry—accounts for around 60 percent of national exports and employs over 15 million workers directly, with tens of millions more dependent indirectly. The sector's competitiveness hinges on the timely clearance of imported raw materials, machinery, and inputs. Any delay at the import stage inflates production costs, disrupts supply chains, and undermines exporters' ability to meet international commitments.

APTMA noted that a compounding set of new and existing challenges at Pakistan Customs is causing unprecedented delays, with shipments now taking an average of 10 days to clear, compared to the international benchmark of two to three days.

According to the association, the WeBOC system is now marking a significant proportion of containers for scanning under the National Logistics Cell (NLC) regime, resulting in a multi-step clearance process that adds days to each shipment. This includes scanning after several days, followed by physical examination, grounding of containers, assessment, and final release—extending total clearance time to at least 10 days.

APTMA argued that the indiscriminate application of scanning and examination to compliant importers, without risk-based differentiation, defeats the purpose of Pakistan's commitments under the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement.

The Association also raised concerns over a proposed “Super Auditor” system, under which third-party auditors would be authorised to jointly examine imported goods with customs officials. While supporting accountability and revenue protection, APTMA warned that involving private auditors in enforcement functions raises serious legal, transparency, and conflict-of-interest concerns. It may also prolong clearance times, increase the risk of goods deterioration, and create opportunities for rent-seeking and harassment of bona fide importers.

APTMA stressed that any such system should only be introduced after full consultation with stakeholders, backed by a clear legal framework and safeguards against misuse.

In addition, importers are facing overlapping scrutiny of Goods Declarations (GDs) by multiple agencies—including Customs Intelligence, Customs Enforcement (Preventive), and Post Clearance Audit—at different stages of the clearance process. This, the association said, has created extreme regulatory uncertainty, making it difficult for businesses to plan production, meet export deadlines, and avoid heavy demurrage and detention charges.

APTMA further noted that the government’s faceless assessment system—introduced to reduce human interaction and curb corruption—has not delivered the intended facilitation. Members have reported arbitrary valuation enhancements, classification disputes, lack of accountability, and technical glitches in the WeBOC system that leave consignments stuck for days.

Operational inefficiencies at terminals, particularly Karachi International Container Terminal (KICT) and South Asia Pakistan Terminals (SAPT), are also contributing to delays. Even after customs orders containers to be grounded for inspection, terminals often fail to comply promptly due to congestion and equipment shortages, while importers continue to incur demurrage and detention charges. APTMA has urged the government to impose mandatory service timelines on terminals, along with penalties for non-compliance.

For textile inputs such as cotton, jute, and natural fibres, clearance from the Plant Protection Department (PPD) is mandatory. However, APTMA members report chronic delays due to limited availability of PPD staff and sequential processing, which further extends overall clearance time.

The Association warned that the cumulative impact of these issues is devastating, with the sector incurring millions of dollars in monthly losses due to demurrage, production disruptions, penalties from international buyers, and rising financial costs. It also cautioned that Pakistan risks losing export orders permanently to competing countries such as Bangladesh, India, Vietnam, and Turkey.

“Pakistan stands at a critical inflection point. Every day of unnecessary delay at our ports is a day our exporters lose orders, our workers lose employment, and the country loses precious foreign exchange,” Kamran Arshad said.

APTMA urged the Prime Minister to constitute an Emergency Task Force to resolve these issues within 30 days, seeking immediate intervention to prevent irreversible damage to the country’s largest export sector.

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