

## Customs officers observe pen down strike

Customs officers - principal appraisers and appraisers Saturday observed pen-down strike at Custom House against the measures taken by the Chief Collector Abdur Rasheed to eradicate malpractices. According to sources, Model Customs Collectorate (MCC) appraisement (East and West), which were known for corruption where no consignment was cleared without speed money, have observed pen-down strike against the measures taken by the Chief Collector Abdur Rasheed to make the customs clearance system transparent.

Sources said that Principal Appraisers and Appraisers used to make calls to the traders during assessment and demanded speed money for consignments' clearance and if the demand was not entertained, these customs officers called irrelevant documents and delayed consignments' clearance with no reason and forced the traders to grease their palms to avoid additional financial burden of demurrages and detentions.

Keeping the grievances of the traders in view, the Chief Collector Appraisement Abdur Rasheed has now imposed a ban on the use of cell phones in assessment hall to forestall the said malpractices being carried out by the customs officers, sources said.

There are also reports that customs officers are involved in the imports of miscellaneous consignments and clear the same on self-assessment basis. Therefore, the chief collector has also barred the self-assessment on miscellaneous consignments and made the clearance of these consignments mandatory through clearing agents from October 20, 2017, igniting the Principal Appraisers and Appraisers to observe pen-down strike from Saturday.

When contacted, Chief Collector Abdur Rasheed, confirmed to have taken aforesaid measures with the support of chairman FBR Tariq Mahmood Pasha and Member Customs Muhammad Zahid Khokhar not only to eradicate corruption but to facilitate the trade at maximum.

He said that these measures were aimed at improving revenue collection and facilitating the traders, who were being forced to pay extortion to these officers, who did nothing but earning bad names for the department. He said that department was poised to accept their all genuine demands but the Principal Appraisers and Appraisers, who went on pen-down strike, had so far not tabled their demands to call off strike.

Replying to a question, he ruled out the possibilities of consignments backlog, due to said strike, saying that large number of Principal Appraisers and Appraisers were against the strike and ready to resume work. Meanwhile, sources said that IDs of Principal Appraisers and Appraisers were also transferred to deputy collector, assistant collector and additional collector, who would now manage the clearance process from Monday to avoid consignments backlog.

Needless to mention, Chief Collector Appraisement Rasheed Sheikh during raid also recovered Rs 3 million cash from a Principal Appraiser and an Appraiser posted at Appraisement West (Group VII) designated to the clearance of imported vehicles.

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