

Customs officers call of pen-down strike amid divergent claims

Customs officers - Principal Appraisers and Appraisers have called off their pen-down strike at the Custom House after experiencing no compromise policy by the Chief Collector Abdur Rasheed and his team. According to sources, the Principal Appraisers and Appraisers went on strike in order to pressurize the Chief Collector and his team for withdrawal of their decisions regarding the ban on the use of cell phones in assessment hall and the restrictions imposed on the self-assessment of miscellaneous consignments.

However, after experiencing no compromise policy from the Chief Collector and his team and strong opposition from large number of Principal Appraisers and Appraisers, these officers called off their pen-down strike, sources said. When contacted, Chief Collector said that they had met with Collector Port Qasim and tabled three grievances.

He said that they wanted to have assurance that no IDs of the assessing / examining staff shall be blocked by DC (HQ) / (MIS) without approval of the fact-finding committee, discontinuation of daily reports and special arrangements for expenses of law cases, audit cases, custom tariffs and others miscellaneous charges.

"The department has neither accepted nor received any other demand except these demands," he maintained. Sources further said that officials from Principal Appraisers and Appraisers association claimed that they called-off their strike on the assurance of collector Port Qasim during meeting and presented him 21 demands, which were as follow:

Unnecessary and undue interference of Chief Collector in official working and his disgusting attitude towards assessment and examination staff may be avoided. Insulting attitude of supervisory officers such as physical search of the relevant desk and passing of the insulting remarks to the subordinates may be avoided. Discontinuation of daily reports was also demanded. If any report is required the same may be retrieved from the concerned AC/DC because preparation of such statements increase time of the assessment. A joint committee may be constituted under the Chairmanship of the Collector (MCCA-West) including officers of ADC/DC level officers and representatives of the concerned associations that may meet regularly with scheduled intervals to sort out the problems/grievances of the staff. Timely/speedy disposal of house hiring cases. Continuation of UP allowance to the newly recruited Appraising/Valuation Officers. Non-observance of official working hours and gazette holidays (including Saturdays and Sundays) and compelling for late sitting beyond the office hours: Suppression of basic legal rights of liberty, honour & communication etc: Verbal/ instructions regarding official work such as not to send or send GDs to subsequent folder, may be discontinued. In case any instructions are required, the same may be issued in writing. Assurance of payment of special allowance being paid by the off dock terminals to the concerned Examining Officers. Special arrangements for expenses of law cases, audit cases, Custom Tariffs and others miscellaneous

charges. Assurance that no staff shall be nominated in FIRs without proper initial inquiries by fact finding Committee comprising by AO/PA/DC/ADC headed by concerned Collector. Assurance of speedy finalization of disciplinary proceedings against staff as required under the law. It is noted that such disciplinary cases are lying pending for finalization for the years. To undo action taken against staff of Group (VII)/MCCA- West as the enquiry conducted in this regard proved innocence of said staff and reversal of orders and immediate re-instatement of the officials of Group-VII. Since un-sticking of the GDs from the AC/DC takes time subject to his availability, therefore, assessing officers may have option to un-stick GDs, at his own level, having multiple items of different PCTs for detail scrutiny and proper assessment. Assessing officer may also have the option to route the GD through concerned AC/DC through folder. Pursuing the cases at tribunal level through DRs and legal counsels: Assurance that no IDs of the assessing/examining staff shall be blocked by DC (HQ)/(MIS) without approval of the Fact-Finding Committee. A joint committee may be constituted under the chairmanship of the Collector (MCCA-West) including officers of ADC/DC level officers and representatives of the concerned associations which may meet on regular scheduled interval to sort out the problems/grievances of the staff.

Meanwhile, Arshad Jamal, spokesman All Pakistan Customs Agents Association in his statement said that this strike had put additional financial burdens on the traders, which led increasing cost of doing business manifold.

He said that the strike, which was called against the measures taken by the Chief Collector Abdur Rasheed to eradicate corruption, had only affected the traders. He also demanded the Prime Minister to order an inquiry as these measures had not eliminated corruption but created negative impact on the businesses of the traders.

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