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Pakistan Traders Launch Nationwide Strike Against Expanded FBR Powers

July 21, 2025

– Categories: Economics



On July 19, 2025, traders across Pakistan staged a nationwide strike, shutting down major markets to protest the Federal Board of Revenue's (FBR) expanded powers under the Finance Act 2025-26. The strike, led by the Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI), disrupted commerce in cities like Karachi, Lahore, and Peshawar, reflecting deep frustration with what traders call anti-business measures.

The KCCI, backed by over 50 trade and industrial associations, spearheaded the protest against new FBR powers, including authority to arrest traders, impose penalties on cash transactions over Rs200,000, and enforce digital invoicing. “These measures suffocate businesses already struggling with inflation,” KCCI President Jawed Bilwani declared, warning of extended strikes if demands go unmet (Pakistan Today, July 20, 2025). In Karachi, markets like Jodia Bazar and wholesale hubs closed, with support from the All Pakistan Restaurants Association and transport unions. Lahore’s Shah Alam Market and Akbari Mandi saw similar shutdowns, as the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) condemned the lack of private-sector consultation (The Tribune, July 20, 2025).

Tensions flared as the business community split, with the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) opting for dialogue after talks with Special Assistant to the Prime Minister Haroon Akhtar Khan. FPCCI’s Saquib Fayyaz Magoon claimed a deferral agreement, but Bilwani insisted no written assurances were provided, pushing the strike forward (Dawn, July 19, 2025). All Karachi Tajir Ittehad Chairman Atiq Mir called the FBR’s raid and arrest powers “harassment,” arguing they drive businesses into the shadows (Dawn.com, July 20, 2025).

The strike highlights broader economic grievances, with traders decrying policies that burden small businesses while failing to address systemic tax evasion. The FBR’s new authority to seal unregistered premises and block high-value transactions for non-filers has sparked fears of overreach. As Pakistan’s economy teeters, the government must balance revenue needs with fostering a business-friendly environment. Without

swift resolution, escalating protests could further destabilize commerce, undermining public trust in governance.