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Pakistan Customs Denies Money Laundering Allegations in Car Imports

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Pakistan Customs officials have rejected recent allegations of money laundering and under-invoicing tied to luxury vehicle imports, asserting that no evidence has emerged to support these claims so far.

At a press conference on Wednesday, Chief Collector of Customs Jamil Nasir, flanked by Collector East Tayyaba Kayani and Collector West Shafiq, emphasized that all luxury vehicle imports continue to follow long-standing procedures. These practices remain in place despite recent changes introduced under the faceless assessment system.

Nasir clarified that the department has not yet received a post-clearance audit report and said any formal conclusions or action would only be made once the audit is complete. He admitted, however, that the post-clearance process needs reinforcement, citing a lack of manpower as a key obstacle.

In response to public concern, Nasir explained that the Import Policy Order 2022 explicitly prohibits the commercial import of used vehicles. The only exceptions are for overseas Pakistanis, who may bring in vehicles under approved channels like the personal baggage and gift schemes. Even then, all applicable duties and taxes must be paid directly from the importer's bank account, ensuring traceability and compliance.

Highlighting ongoing reforms, Nasir announced that the Central Appraising Unit now operates in two shifts, from 8 a.m. to midnight, to accelerate customs processing. The faceless assessment mechanism has significantly improved operational efficiency, now handling up to 2,000 Goods Declarations daily.

Further updates include the activation of a Central Examination Unit and the implementation of a virtual hearing system, allowing stakeholders to attend proceedings remotely. According to Nasir, these measures aim to reduce bureaucratic delays and boost transparency in customs operations.

The Chief Collector added that lab sampling reports, previously a source of holdups, are now being delivered within 24 hours, contributing to faster cargo clearances. He stated that the department is entering a phase of stability, with reforms beginning to yield tangible benefits.

The press conference follows recent public criticism over the undervaluation of certain imported SUVs, including one reportedly brought in for just Rs17,635, raising questions about tax evasion. While the case has not been directly linked to any officials, it has intensified scrutiny of customs procedures.

Customs authorities have reaffirmed their commitment to improving regulatory enforcement and public trust, promising transparency and accountability in all upcoming audits.