

## Hostile Behaviour of AJK Authorities Towards AJK-based Premier Cigarette Group cause loss of billions of Rs. To State Exchequer: Management.



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MIRPUR ( AJK): Dec. 26: Walton Tobacco Company allegedly Faces Unjust Treatment from Authorities Despite Significant Contributions to Economy and Employment in Azad Jammu Kashmir.

According to a probe, Walton Tobacco Company, a leading taxpayer and major provider of employment in the region, is once again allegedly, facing unjust and unlawful treatment from various government departments. Despite its significant contributions to the national economy, the company has been subjected to unfair actions by the Tax, Environment, Industry, and Local Administrative departments, which have adversely affected its operations, says a press release issued by the management of the State's Premier business group.

On April 4, 2024, the PR continued, Walton Tobacco's factory was sealed by the Inland Revenue Department without prior notice or legal justification. This action was challenged in court, and on May 30, 2024, the High Court suspended the seizure order, directing the authorities to respect the legal decision. However, the Inland Revenue Department continued to ignore the Court's order, refusing to comply despite a subsequent reaffirmation of the suspension on June 5, 2024. Even after offering a substantial increase in tax payments of Rs. 26 crore per month, the department failed to respond positively.

The unjust closure of Walton Tobacco for over 8 months resulted in significant losses to the exchequer—amounting to Rs. 208 crore—and an additional Rs. 50 crore loss to the company. The closure also led to the loss of employment for 500 workers and their families, creating a severe social and economic impact. The factory was finally reopened on November 8, 2024, following the High Court's order.

However, in a shocking turn of events, the Inland Revenue Department once again sealed the factory on December 24, 2024, despite the company meeting the year-long demands of the department, including

withdrawing its status quo on the Track and Trace system. This action was undertaken under the assurance of the department that Walton Tobacco would embark on a new era of growth, development, and prosperity.

“We remain committed to fulfilling our responsibilities as a leading business entity, and it is deeply disheartening to see that, despite all efforts, Walton Tobacco Company continues to be treated unjustly and unfairly”, the PR said quoting a spokesperson adding “We call on the authorities to reconsider their actions and allow the company to operate freely, contributing to the economy, providing employment, and serving the community”.