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Traders hold nationwide protests against tax hikes, electricity price increases

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RAWALPINDI/ PESHAWAR/ ISLAMABAD:

Traders in all major urban centres of the country staged protests against the government's decision to increase taxes and electricity prices in the upcoming fiscal year. In Islamabad, traders, responding to a call by the All Pakistan Anjuman-e-Tajiran, staged a major protest at Aabpara

Chowk, blocking the main road. Heavy police presence was deployed to disperse the demonstrators as trader caravans from across the city converged at Aabpara Chowk. A large police presence was deployed as convoys of traders led by leaders from various markets across Islamabad arrived to protest against the government's tax increases and electricity price hikes. Chanting slogans against the government, protesters held banners and electricity bills. "This is purely a traders' protest; no political party is allowed to claim it," declared Aabpara Market General Secretary Akhtar Abbasi. "I am a member of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, but we have put politics aside for the public interest. We have raised our voices against the exorbitant increase in electricity bills for the sake of the poor," Abbasi added. Traders chanted slogans rejecting high electricity prices. "Traders nationwide are protesting the significant hike in electricity prices," stated Ajmal Baloch, President of the All Pakistan Anjuman-e-Tajiran. "Soon, the rulers will be held accountable by the people," he warned. "The prime minister, who says our budget is made by the IMF, should resign immediately," Baloch asserted. "There are twelve-hour power outages in the country. The same companies you make agreements with are responsible for generating electricity," he added. Baloch highlighted the various taxes on electricity bills: "There is a 21% sales tax on a fourteen-thousand-rupee bill, followed by thirteen other types of taxes." He criticised political leaders for not fulfilling their election promises. "Nawaz Sharif and Bilawal

promised free electricity for up to 300 units during elections,” he said. “May God guide you, as you are failing to govern effectively,” Baloch remarked. He further condemned the government for its mismanagement and corruption. Baloch also pointed out the widespread nature of the protests: “Traders are protesting in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Karachi, Balochistan, and Sindh. There is no district or tehsil in Pakistan without protests right now.” He issued a warning to the government: “If these electricity taxes are not withdrawn, we will initiate a shutter-down strike. If the government does not roll back the electricity price hike, we will decide on further actions after consultation.” Baloch criticised the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) for labelling traders as thieves, emphasising that 17,000 industrialists and traders pay taxes. He accused parliamentarians of misappropriating funds allocated for infrastructure. “These rulers are not just thieves; they are robbers,” Baloch declared. “Prime Minister, listen carefully, your government is on shaky ground. Withdraw the taxes on electricity, or the next protest will be a siege of the Prime Minister’s House,” he warned. He noted that 1.5 million Pakistanis have left the country and criticised Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar for ruining the real estate business with excessive taxation. Baloch concluded with rallying cries for unity and action, urging people to awaken for the country’s sake. Women also joined the protest against electricity price hikes, with the demonstration ending peacefully as traders dispersed. In Rawalpindi, symbolic shutter-down

strikes failed to materialise across all markets due to factionalism within trader organisations.

However, traders took to the streets, chanting slogans against taxes on electricity bills and burning gas bills. The protest on Bank Road saw participation from traders of Kashmir Road, Haider Road, and other markets. One faction of traders held a symbolic strike by closing businesses at 4pm. In Peshawar, traders held a protest rally against tax impositions, electricity price hikes, and inflation. Organised by the Tanzeem Tajiran, the rally commenced from Milad Chowk and concluded at Chowk Yadgar, with participants demanding the removal of newly imposed taxes and reduction in electricity prices.

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