

3,000 tonnes of Pakistan-bound chillies stranded near border

Trucks carrying over 3,000 tonnes of Indian red chillies bound for the Pakistani market have been stranded at Attari near the border for the past two weeks, triggering a protest by the irate truck drivers Monday demanding that the stocks be unloaded for further transit.

Over 200 Indian trucks have been stuck at Attari, 30 km from the international border between, due to lack of coordination between the railways and customs' officials.

Truck drivers, who have brought the red chillies from states like Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Orissa, Monday staged a protest outside the deputy commissioner's office after which local traders and exporters were roped in by district authorities to get the stocks unloaded.

The red chillies are to be transported by goods trains to Pakistan. The non-availability of the required number of wagons to transport the red chillies has led to the present situation.

"This is not a one-off incident. It is routine with railways and customs officials not to coordinate. They want to make things impossible. Trade between both countries suffers due to their indifference. We have been stuck here for a fortnight," one truck driver, requesting anonymity, told IANS.

The red chillies stock is worth millions of rupees.

Both countries allowed trucks from each others' side to drive into the other's territory to off-load goods in a restricted area around the border. The process started Oct 1 last year and has been a runaway hit with trade of various items increasing by three to five times.

Railway officials here said that the red chillies trade had increased and they were trying to requisition more wagons for transportation.

"But this will take time. Traders also do not book the wagons in advance resulting in backlog," one railway official said.

'Railway and customs officials are way behind in matching the rising trade with requisite infrastructure. The space and wagons required are just not available at the Amritsar railway station yard," Amritsar-based exporter Mukesh Sindhwani said.

Traders say that if required facilities are not provided, exporting goods to Pakistan will become an expensive affair and lead to a dip in trade.

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