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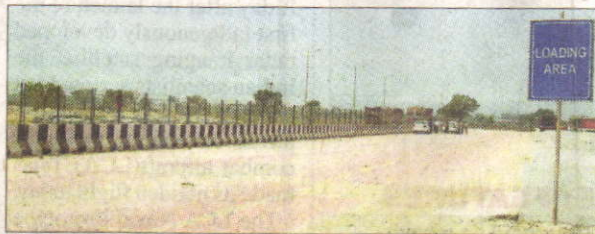
# Strike reduces trade to a trickle at Attari checkpoint

PERNEET SINGH/TNS

AMRITSAR, APRIL 27

Bilateral trade between India and Pakistan via Attari-Wagah land route today virtually came to a near halt after a strike by Indian traders protesting against "excessive handling charges" at the new Integrated Check Post.

The cargo area meant for exports wore a deserted look. The only area that witnessed some activity was the cargo terminal for imports where gypsum and cement arrived from Pakistan. Though a large section of porters was sitting idle following the strike call, some of them were spotted unloading cement from Pakistan. However, the number of trucks arriving from Pakistan also dropped considerably.



## ICP RATES UPSET TRADERS

- Indian traders are protesting "excessive handling charges" at the new Integrated Check Post
- Traders claim that they are being charged 40% extra at the ICP as compared to the older checkpoint
- While the cargo area meant for exports at the ICP wore a deserted look on Friday, the Central Warehousing Corporation said the trade was on and only the volume had reduced

Some Indian trucks were seen in the import area where gypsum was unloaded, but no lifting took place.

The protesting traders also visited the ICP in the morning to ensure that the trade was stopped completely.

"We have asked the exporters in Pakistan to stop sending gypsum and cement till further directions.

The traders have reportedly been invited to Delhi for talks, which may take place on Tuesday. Continued on page 8

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From page 1

Moreover, apart from stopping exports, we are also now lifting the goods that are now arriving from Pakistan," they said. Talking to the media-persons at the ICP, Amritsar Dry Fruit Association Chief Anil Mehra said: "We were hoping that the ICP would boost the Indo-Pak trade, but this checkpoint is no good."

"They are charging us 40 per cent extra as compared to the old checkpoint. We were not taken into confidence when these rates were finalised," said Mehra.

Leading traders Iqbal Singh Jedi and Manav Taneja said they had agreed to pay the rate, which they had negotiated with the labour, to the Central Warehousing Corporation (CWC). However, apart from that, they are being charged Rs 200 per truck as entry fee, storage charges and 12 per cent service tax, which had turned the trade unviable. "The ICP

was meant to promote trade between India and Pakistan and not to derail it," they said, adding that they will not resume the trade until the handling charges are brought down. On the other hand, CWC Manager at ICP Rameshwar claimed that the trade was on at the new checkpoint. "The traders had come in the morning and tried to stop the trade. However, the trade