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ICP sees decline in cement, dry fruit import

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With the rupee hitting an all-time low of 55.35 against dollar, importers trading in various commodities like cement, gypsum and dry fruits from Pakistan via the Attari-Wagah land route have started feeling the heat as the trade here is carried out in dollars. There are already reports of decline in import of cement and dry fruits and it is feared that the imports may witness a further drop in the coming days.

Talking to The Tribune, leading cement importer Randeep Singh said imports had become expensive and

were no more competitive. "The landing cost of a 50-kg bag of cement imported from Pakistan comes at around Rs 260, including duties and taxes, while the same bag is selling at Rs 240 in the local market".

He said the stock of cement arriving at the Integrated Check Post (ICP) in Attari pertained to earlier orders. "Now, we have completely stopped placing fresh orders as it will only add to our mounting losses," he added.

Jaspal Singh, a clearing agent at the ICP, said with the value of rupee touching new lows, import of dry fruits and dry dates from Pakistan had been reduced to half. About other commodities, he said things would become



Trucks lined up at the ICP at Wagah. A file photo

clear in the next four-five days as right now the orders placed earlier were being executed.

Indo-Foreign Chamber of Commerce president BK Bajaj, who is also a dry fruit importer, said: "The rupee has depreciated tremendously and it will definitely impact the bilateral trade between India and Pakistan".

He admitted that there was a procedure to make advance bookings for dollar while carrying out trade, but said it was difficult to anticipate the future value of rupee. He said rupee depreciation had made imports costlier. "If the customer accepts an increase in the price of imported goods, imports will continue, but if there is a resistance, we

will have to cut down on imports," he added.

Prominent gypsum importer Iqbal Singh Bedi said he had already reduced the import of gypsum from Pakistan to half. "We survive on thin margins in this highly competitive market and any depreciation in rupee adversely affects our profits".

CII National Council on Public Policy member Gunbir Singh said even booking of dollar was a short-term measure for traders to edge the higher rates.

Sources at the ICP said there had been some drop in the import of cement, but the flow of other commodities continued as normal. However, these might be the orders placed earlier, they added.