

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

“The overarching objective of the new Tariff Policy is to reduce front-loading so that the domestic industry attains competitiveness, particularly the downstream industry, which, being involved in value addition, needs cheaper input to produce finished goods at competitive prices”

Mr. Muhammad Iqbal Tabish
Acting Chairman
National Tariff Commission (NTC)

ICMA: The new Tariff Policy 2025–30 aims for simpler tariffs and export-led growth. How is NTC contributing to turning this vision into reality?

Muhammad Iqbal Tabish: National Tariff Commission is aligning tariff structures with national competitiveness objectives by rationalizing duty slabs, minimizing cascading effects, and prioritizing input facilitation for export-oriented sectors. The overarching objective of the new Tariff Policy is to reduce front-loading so that the domestic industry attains competitiveness, particularly the downstream industry, which, being involved in value addition, needs cheaper inputs to produce finished goods at competitive prices.

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All tariff recommendations under the new policy framework are guided by evidence-based analysis.

ICMA: Trade-remedy measures are often in focus. In your view, how do they help protect and strengthen Pakistan's industries?

Muhammad Iqbal Tabish: Pakistan has pursued a liberal tariff regime, aiming at deeper cuts in tariffs in a bid to encourage exports; however, the domestic industry, producing intermediate products, also requires reasonable protection as well. This is why the trade remedy instruments such as anti-dumping, countervailing, and safeguard measures remain in focus. These trade remedy instruments are used to shield domestic producers from unfair trade practices to ensure fair competition and sustainable industrial growth.

ICMA: Many businesses believe tariff distortions raise costs and limit competitiveness. What actions is NTC taking to address these concerns?

Muhammad Iqbal Tabish: The costs of production is a serious challenge for Pakistani enterprises. In the presence of higher cost of production in non-tariff related components such as energy, financial, and operational costs, higher tariffs further add to the cost, making domestic products costlier even in the domestic market. NTC is systematically removing anomalies, reducing tariffs on raw materials and intermediates, and harmonizing rates across sectors to lower input costs and enhance value-chain efficiency.

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ICMA: Balancing industrial protection with export competitiveness is always a challenge. How does NTC manage this balance in practice?

Muhammad Iqbal Tabish: Protection is time-bound and strategic, while export competitiveness is long-term. In an analytical review, NTC has found that protection has yielded benefits for some sectors such as flat steel, aluminum cans, chemicals, and footwear that have been able to make a niche in the global market. NTC manages the balance between industrial competitiveness and exports by applying data-driven analysis to calibrate tariffs-providing support where necessary while avoiding inefficiencies.

ICMA: How can tariff reforms be designed to ensure that small and medium-sized industries benefit alongside larger manufacturers?

Muhammad Iqbal Tabish: SMEs do face the greatest challenges from complex tariffs, so our reforms focus on creating neutral incentives across all firm sizes. We are simplifying structures and rationalizing duties on commonly used inputs to make them more affordable. For instance, in the chemical sector, these reforms have enabled smaller firms to source inputs locally and at competitive prices, helping them expand production, create jobs, and integrate more effectively into domestic and global supply chains.

ICMA: The government has emphasized institutional reforms. How is NTC enhancing its efficiency and outreach to better support domestic producers and exporters?

Muhammad Iqbal Tabish: NTC is upgrading digital systems, expanding research capacity, and creating a central databank for trade and tariff analysis. NTC has also improved its outreach to industry through regular interactions with sector-specific associations, exporters, and chambers. This ensures policies are based on real

industry feedback instead of assumptions. Further, NTC conducts on-the-spot investigations both at the domestic and international levels and has enhanced its analytical ability to assist domestic industry to attain competitiveness and provide technical support to Pakistan exporters facing trade remedy actions abroad.

ICMA: Since the cost of production plays a key role in trade investigations, do you see a greater role for cost and management accountants in this process?

Muhammad Iqbal Tabish: Absolutely. Cost and management accountants play a vital role in analyzing production costs and pricing structures, which are essential for determining fair value and injury margins in trade investigations. Recognizing this, NTC ensures that its officers receive regular training in cost accounting to strengthen their analytical capacity and maintain high professional standards when conducting investigations.

ICMA: How can management accountants contribute more actively to policymaking - especially in price setting, cost monitoring, and tariff evaluation?

Muhammad Iqbal Tabish: Management accountants can play a key role by providing data-driven insights on production costs, pricing, and industry performance, which directly support tariff evaluation and policy formulation. At NTC, a few of our officers come from cost and management accounting backgrounds, and their expertise greatly enhances our analytical work and the quality of policy recommendations. However, the majority of officers are trade economists, who undertake broader economic analysis on firms and industries in addition to cost of production, which is also an integral part of NTC's work.

The Editorial Board thanks Mr. Muhammad Iqbal Tabish, Acting Chairman, National Tariff Commission (NTC) for sparing his precious time to give an exclusive interview for Chartered Management Accountant Journal.