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Thousands of Trucks Stuck at Kazakhstan-Russia Border Amid Customs Crackdown

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Ilya Moskovets / URA.RU / TASS

Thousands of trucks carrying goods from China are backed up at the Kazakhstan-Russia border due to tightened customs checks, the Kommersant business daily reported Thursday, citing cargo companies.

Transport operators see the situation as a sign that Kazakhstan is moving toward closer compliance with Western sanctions imposed on Russia after its 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

Around 2,000-3,000 trucks have piled up at the Mashtakovo border crossing, according to Alexander Azatyan, head of logistics at YM Trans Group. One road freight industry source put the figure even higher, claiming as many as 7,500 vehicles were stuck.

Kazakh authorities said the congestion stems from stricter enforcement by Russian customs against gray-market imports. A source told Kommersant that both Moscow and Astana have

stepped up inspections and raids aimed at identifying unscrupulous shippers.

The congestion mainly concerns dual-use goods subject to sanctions including electronics, drones and Western-brand products, said Maxim Yemelin, deputy head of logistics at the SLK logistics company.

Since mid-September, customs officers have inspected 99% of trucks suspected of carrying sanctioned goods, he added. Non-sanctioned cargo usually clears the border within three to five days.

Azatyan noted that the delays concern cargo already cleared in Kazakhstan, while transit shipments are not affected.

Yaroslav Belousov, director of international transport operations at FM Logistic in Russia, confirmed that large numbers of trucks were awaiting inspection due to tightened controls at the border.

However, he said major clients are less affected since they regularly send 30-50 trucks across the border each week.

Last week, Russia's Federal Customs Service denied that either country's authorities were creating barriers to trade.

"The buildup of vehicles near the border is caused by unscrupulous participants in foreign economic activity, who fail to give carriers the instructions needed to cross the border," it said on Telegram.

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