

The Nation

Illicit tobacco trade dented economy

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LAHORE - The mushroomed spread of illicit tobacco trade not only dented Pakistan's economy but also posed a serious threat in the backdrop of a strong nexus between pervasive tobacco black market and dreaded criminal outfits.

Large-sale smuggling of different items, cigarettes in particular, had long been regarded as one of the major sources of funding to organized criminal syndicates. These criminal groups patronize mega smuggling rackets that were said to be illegally transporting tobacco worth billions of rupees from Afghanistan to Pakistan. By the end of the year 2016, the market share of illegal cigarette trade in Pakistan stood at 40 per cent. This menace was causing a loss of an estimated Rs 40 billion annually to the national exchequer.

In 2014, more than 2 billion sticks annually were smuggled into Pakistan, mainly from Dubai and Afghanistan.

Nexus between illicit tobacco trade and crime networks also mounted the United States concerns. President Donald Trump recently signed into law the National Defence Authorisation Act, which also contained key provisions related to combating the illicit trade in tobacco products.

The US Senate Armed Services Committee issued a report outlining its concerns about tobacco trafficking.

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