

Sale of smuggled cigarettes on rise in Hyderabad

Law enforcement agencies in city, neighbouring Commissionerates regularly raiding, seizing huge quantities of these cigarettes

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Hyderabad Police Commissioner Anjani Kumar inspecting the foreign cigarettes which were seized by the Task Force. (file photo)

Hyderabad: Notwithstanding the crackdown by the police, the sale of smuggled foreign cigarettes continues in Hyderabad with pan shops finding a way to acquire the contraband and stock it.

The law enforcement agencies in the city and neighbouring Commissionerates have been regularly raiding and seizing huge quantities of these cigarettes but the actions apparently have failed to deter the illegal sale of foreign cigarettes.

Cigarettes of various brands like Wins, Paris, Gold Queen, Flame, Djarum Black and Gudang Garam are smuggled into the country by non-declaration and concealment. The cigarettes are usually smuggled into the country through sea ports and air from Hong Kong, Dubai, South Korea and Kuala Lumpur, according to the officials. Later the consignment is transported to different cities across the country.

Traditionally, the markets of Siddiamber Bazaar, Begum Bazaar and Monda Market have been the wholesale hubs of illegal foreign cigarettes. "There is a demand for the international brands of cigarettes in the city. Secondly the profits are high so the traders take risks and bring it into the city," said P Radha Kishan Rao, DCP Task Force.

Such cigarette brands do not carry warnings or have any minimal cautionary messages, which are mandatory under the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Packaging and Labelling) Rules, 2006. Apart from evading customs duty, the smuggling of cigarettes also poses a threat to the anti-tobacco initiative taken up by both the Centre and the State governments.

The main intention behind the smuggling of cigarettes from other countries is to avoid paying GST and other taxes thereby avoiding government revenue. Cautions have been made several times on the tobacco content in these cigarettes being high which has an adverse effect on health too.

However, after the lockdown restrictions were lifted, the cigarettes again found their way to the pan shops in the city. Nevertheless, the police say they are keeping a watch on the big traders to prevent the distribution of the contraband to local traders.

“In last one month we busted two major rackets being run from Shahinayathgunj in the city. The smuggling activity for time being has come down, however, as it is a lucrative business the smugglers try to find new ways to bring it in the city. No doubt our teams put in all efforts and try to prevent it,” said the official.

The city police busted two rackets and seized property worth Rs 1.03 crore and Rs 16 lakh recently.

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