

With train services on the rise, RPF put on high alert to curb tobacco smuggling

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Image used for representational purposes only. (File Photo | PTI)

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TIRUCHY: The availability of banned tobacco products even at small shops on the outskirts of the city often surprises residents on how they enter the State. Several smugglers are sending such products to Tamil Nadu through trains, and the RPF under the Tiruchy division, has often thwarted many such attempts. In 2021, RPF Tiruchy division seized 818 kg of banned tobacco products worth Rs 15.38 lakh. With the railways now operating more trains, sources said the force has stepped up vigil to prevent the movement of banned products through trains.

In most of the cases, banned tobacco products were found abandoned in bags on coaches. Sources said the RPF is in touch with excise and other departments to nab the offenders. According to officials, most of these banned products are reaching Tamil Nadu through trains coming from the northern and eastern states.

In January, the RPF Tiruchy division seized about 185 kg of banned tobacco products worth Rs 1.02 lakh. In February, the team seized about 217.92 kg of products worth Rs 4.66 lakh. From March 1 to March 16, the division caught about 108.35 kg products worth Rs 92,537. Though the flow of banned products through rail network has raised concern, senior officials are confident of bringing down the number of cases.

"We have directed our teams on board the trains and at stations to maintain strict vigil. Since thousands of people travel on trains every day, it is difficult to identify who might have left behind a bag of banned products on a coach. However, our team is thoroughly scanning CCTV footage and we will catch the offenders," a source said.

Apart from the seizure of the banned products, RPF has rescued several children brought to Tiruchy and nearby districts for work. In 2021, the force rescued a total of 147 children. In the recent months, it rescued several children and sources said most of them were sent to work as the pandemic badly affected the financial status of several families in the north and east. Senior officials said they are closely monitoring the operations.

"We have formed special teams in Tiruchy and Villupuram. They are conducting thorough inspections on trains, especially from north and east. Our crime intelligence squad and crime prevention and detection squad are also monitoring the work," RPF's Senior Divisional Security Commissioner S Ramakrishnan said.

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