

Del bizwoman held after ₹11cr worth foreign ciggies seized

Mumbai: The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) has unearthed a cigarette smuggling racket with the seizure of two containers packed with banned foreign brands worth nearly Rs 11 crore at Nhava Sheva port. The contraband was misdeclared as fresh fruits, mushrooms and Thai lotus, reports **Ahmed Ali**.

The DRI arrested a businesswoman, identified as Neha Sharma, from Delhi for her involvement in the racket.

There were 63.6 lakh cigarette sticks worth over Rs 10.8 crore in the containers. DRI officials said they suspected there were three more containers, which were yet to be declared. The DRI zonal unit acted on specific intelligence and intercepted two refrigerated containers that arrived at Nhava Sheva that had been declared to be a fruit. Examination of the containers revealed the import was done by Vishwas International.

The first container held 466 thermal boxes with 15,506 cartons that had more than 31 lakh cigarette sticks of various brands, besides 583 plastic boxes with longans.

Investigations revealed that the cargo was imported from Thailand and customs broker Unity Cargo Care was coordinating for the clearance of the goods. Officials recorded the statements of a partner of Unity, Milind Karangutkar, who said Vishwas International had been suggested to him by Krushna Panda, an employee of forwarder Falcon Air Sea Logistic. All activities of the firm were handled by Sharma from Delhi.

The examination of another container lying with Gateway Distriparks at Nhava Seva resulted in the recovery of 467 thermal boxes containing 32.65 lakh cigarette sticks.