

Cigarettes worth 5 crore seized, 4 Iranian crew held

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Ahmedabad: The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) on Saturday apprehended four Iranian crew members after intercepting a suspicious foreign boat, and seized around 1 lakh packets of banned cigarettes kept in 200 cartons.



The operation, by an ICG ship deployed on forward area patrol under Coast Guard Region (North West), was conducted inside India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), nearly 115 nautical miles west of Dwarka in the North Arabian Sea.

Officials said the foreign boat's movements appeared suspicious, prompting the patrol ship to close in for investigation. On spotting the ICG ship, the boat sped towards the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL), but was

intercepted and stopped, they added.

An ICG boarding team found four crew members on board, all of whom were identified as Iranian nationals during preliminary questioning. The vessel, reportedly registered in Colombo, Sri Lanka, was identified as Al Mukhtar, although it transmitted a different name on its Automatic Identification System (AIS), raising further suspicion.

The crew failed to produce valid documentation or provide a satisfactory explanation for their presence in Indian waters. A search of the boat led to the discovery of 200 cartons containing approximately 1 lakh cigarette packets concealed in the hold. The international market value of the seized consignment was estimated between Rs 2.5 crore and Rs 5 crore, subject to verification by authorities concerned. The ICG team also recovered a Thuraya satellite communication set, banned in India, and eight mobile phones, including four with internet connectivity. The intercepted boat was escorted to Porbandar for further investigation and legal proceedings.

Source: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ahmedabad/cigarettes-worth-5-crore-seized-4-iranian-crew-held/articleshow/128686980.cms>