

## Indo-Bhutan customs meet in Munnar flags e-cigarettes, counterfeit cigarettes smuggling

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KOCHI: The ongoing Indo-Bhutan Joint Customs Group meeting on Integrated Border Management in Munnar has flagged the growing menace of smuggling of e-cigarettes and counterfeit [cigarettes](#) into India through Bhutan, with officials highlighting the scale and organised nature of the illegal trade.

Sources said the meeting is examining how e-cigarettes, along with counterfeit versions of Indian-brand cigarettes produced by illegal rackets, are transported through road routes across border points, alongside other issues. These consignments are often concealed among legitimate goods to evade detection before being distributed through networks operating across various parts of the country.



Smuggled e-cigarettes seized by Indian authorities at the Indo-Bhutan border. File photo | Express

Officials from the Border Security Force (BSF) and Customs have, on several occasions, intercepted vehicles carrying large quantities of such contraband, pointing to the persistence of the smuggling operations despite tighter surveillance. The seizures indicate the involvement of well-coordinated syndicates exploiting porous stretches along the border.

In India, the import, sale and distribution of e-cigarettes are prohibited under the Prohibition of Electronic Cigarettes Act, 2019. Counterfeit cigarettes, often passed off as genuine Indian brands, also pose a serious challenge to enforcement agencies. However, steady demand in the domestic market continues to drive the illegal inflow of these products.

Sources noted that a significant share of such consignments enters India via road routes through Bhutan, making the issue a key point of discussion at the meeting. Alongside this, officials are also reviewing enforcement measures under initiatives such as Operation Numkhor, which targets organised smuggling networks.

The Joint Customs Group meeting, held annually between India and Bhutan, serves as a platform for strengthening cooperation on border management and intelligence sharing. This year, Bhutan is learnt to have pushed for hosting the meeting in Kerala, with sources attributing the move partly to the role played by the Customs formation in Kochi in handling Operation Numkhor.

The meeting, expected to conclude on Thursday, is likely to enhance coordination and facilitate real-time intelligence exchange between the two countries to curb smuggling and prevent the entry of prohibited and counterfeit goods into India.

**Source:** [https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/kerala/2026/Apr/21/indo-bhutan-customs-meet-in-munnar-flags-e-cigarettes-counterfeit-cigarettes-smuggling-2#:~:text=KOCHI%3A%20The%20ongoing%20Indo-Bhutan.nature%20of%20the%20illegal%](https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/kerala/2026/Apr/21/indo-bhutan-customs-meet-in-munnar-flags-e-cigarettes-counterfeit-cigarettes-smuggling-2#:~:text=KOCHI%3A%20The%20ongoing%20Indo-Bhutan.nature%20of%20the%20illegal%20)