

## **Customs releases consignments of poor quality betel nut**

The staff of Anti Smuggling Organization (ASO) of Directorate Intelligence and Investigation (DI&I), Customs has released a huge quantity of inferior quality betel nut from Karachi ports against undue gains; it was learnt.

According to sources, the consignments of poor quality betel nut, which arrived at Karachi ports during the last three or four months, were earlier detained by the ASO staff of the Directorate. However, one of the superintendents, who is said to be patronized by the high-ups in Islamabad, has released the same against a heavy bribe.

Sources said this blue-eyed superintendent has detained consignments containing 8500 bags of betel nuts, which were released from ports after completing all legal formalities at a warehouse last week. "Instead of lodging an FIR and establishing a seizure report against the importers, this superintendent is now asking Rs 25,000 bribe for the release of each bag," sources informed.

They answered that the clearance of betel nut consignments was continued for years and the customs department despite imposing a high rate of duty and taxes remained unable to generate substantial revenue from its imports, due to high corruption.

There is therefore a need of imposing ban on its imports or enforce strict procedure to avert the clearance of substandard quality of betel nut, they said and added that authorities could make laboratory tests mandatory under 'Post Importation Checks' in order to avoid examination of each betel nut consignment and for the purpose, suitable amendments should be made in upcoming import policy.

Replying to a question, they said that a group, which was supervised by a leading clearing agent, had established a pool to collect 'speed money' from importers and clearing agents for different customs departments including Examination, Appraisalment and Custom Intelligence.

In past, the customs department used to clear the consignments of betel nuts under arranged system where consignees had to pay Rs 20,000 per container as bribe for the clearance of poor quality betel nut. Now, after the issuance of April 30, 2018 deadline by Punjab Food Authority to ban all products of betel nuts, the customs and DI&I officers have started asking Rs 25000 bribe for the release of each bag, sources said and added that around 130 containers of the said commodity were stuck at Karachi ports, due to the said reason.

According to the import records, around 7,200 tonnes or 400 containers of betel nuts are imported per month and the customs department generates a Rs 360 million revenue per month. When contacted Shoukat Ali, Director General, Directorate General Intelligence and Investigation (DI&I), Customs, Islamabad, his Special Assistant Khaldoom on his behalf refused to comment on the issue, saying that investigation was underway.

Similarly, when approached, Fayyaz Anwar Director, DI&I, Karachi for comments, his Investigation Officer (IO) Headquarter Nadeem literally forced the correspondent to leave the office premises. Meanwhile, sources in Department of Plant Protection (DPP) and oncologists

said that this organized corruption especially in preventive and customs intelligence departments for the clearance of betel nuts and other by-products have made Oral Cavity Cancer (OCC) epidemic in Pakistan.

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