

HC junks drug peddling charges in khat leaves case

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Ahmedabad: The drug peddling case that the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) lodged last year against two brothers for importing khat, or *Catha edulis* leaves, from Ethiopia as “Moringa leaves” has fallen flat with Gujarat high court junking the complaint in this regard.

Khat is a flowering plant native to the Horn of Africa and Arabian peninsula. It contains a mono-amine alkaloid called cathinone or cathine, which is an amphetamine-like stimulant.

The reason for Justice J B Pardiwala quashing DRI’s complaint against two persons — Chirag and Ravi Bhojani — under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985 was that they were booked for drug peddling, though khat leaves were not prohibited substance then.

According to Bhojanis’ advocate Ashlesha Patel, they were booked and arrested under NDPS Act in March 2017, but khat leaves came to be included in the list of psychotropic substance under the Act for the first time in February 2018. Thus provisions of NDPS Act cannot be made applicable in this case.

In March last year, DRI’s Ahmedabad zonal unit seized 115kg of khat, valued at Rs 3 crore in the international market, 96kg material was seized in Ahmedabad and 19kg in Bharuch. DRI made the seizure after it came to know that two courier companies, Skyking Express Parcel Service from Bharuch and Fast Track Express from Ahmedabad, were importing and exporting khat leaves from the foreign post office in Ahmedabad and the courier cell at the air cargo complex in the city.

DRI officials had claimed that they had found 19kg of khat leaves concealed in 'Darjeeling tea', that was to be exported to the Netherlands.

The owners of the consignment were identified as Chirag and Ravi Bhojani. DRI also claimed that the duo were exporting khat leaves to the USA, UK and other countries, by declaring it as dried green tea, from the courier cell at the air cargo complex in Ahmedabad.