

Rs 3 crore *ganja* haul

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The marijuana consignment seized in Begusarai on Tuesday. Picture by Rajesh Kumar

Patna: A joint team of the special task force (STF) and the directorate of revenue intelligence arrested two persons and seized marijuana worth Rs 3 crore from a truck in Begusarai district, around 120km northeast of Patna, on Tuesday.

Acting on a tip-off, the STF and revenue personnel intercepted a truck bearing registration number of Bengal near Murli toll plaza under Bachhwara police station and seized 488kg of marijuana.

The consignment booked from Odisha's Sambalpur was to be delivered to one Kundan Rai, a resident of Bidupur in Vaishali district. The narcotics packed in 193 packets were being transported in the specially designed boxes in the truck, senior officials of the STF said in Patna.

The two arrested persons, Chandra Prasad, a resident of Bakhtiarapur under Athmalgola police station in Patna, and Rajan Kumar Rai, a resident of Bidupur in Vaishali district, told interrogators that the kingpin of the drugs racket was Munna, alias Buddha Bada, stated to be a resident of Baragar in Odisha.

Chandra and Rajan were later brought to Patna from Begusarai for further interrogation. Authoritative sources said Odisha's Sambalpur has of late turned into the main centre of narcotics supply in Bihar. "Efforts are on to trace the local link of the racketeers," said the STF official. Begusarai superintendent of police Aditya Kumar, however, feigned ignorance about any seizure of drugs.

The demand of marijuana (*ganja*) has increased in the state following prohibition in April 2016. Official records showed that the police seized 28,888kg of marijuana in 2017, which was more than 2,000 times the 14.4kg impounded in 2015. Similarly, seizure of 329kg of opium last year was 167 times the seizure in 2015, the year that preceded the state government's liquor ban.

The state seized 244kg of hashish in 2017 while had it had not seen a single seizure of this drug in 2015.

In terms of the percentage increase in seizures of heroin, Bihar still is the highest, though the quantities involved remain small.

Bidupur in Vaishali district has turned into a major centre of supply of drugs in the state. "Bidupur in Vaishali has left Bhojpur far behind in the supply of *ganja*," said a senior IPS officer posted at the state police headquarters.