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# In first haul after ban, Rs 3.5 crore khat leaves seized

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MUMBAI: Directorate Revenue of Intelligence (DRI) busted an international drug racket with the seizure of 132kg of khat leaves worth Rs 3.5 crore smuggled into India from Ethiopia. This is the first huge seizure in the country after it was banned on February 27.

Khat is a psychotropic substance prohibited under Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985. They are leaves of an Arabian shrub, which are chewed (or drunk as an infusion) as a stimulant.

The banned drug has been smuggled in by few Ethiopians who are in India on student visas that have expired and the contraband was declared as green tea.

Acting on a tip-off, the sleuths carried out simultaneous raids in Mumbai and Kolkata and seized the leaves. The leaves were being smuggled in by courier, particularly EMS Speed Post, sometimes being declared as green tea or important documents. The contraband was destined for Mumbai, Jaipur, Delhi and Nepal, from there the accused used to distribute it to drug pedlars across India. "When we learnt about the drug cartel, we kept a watch on the suspect but he did not turn to take up to collect the parcel. We have identified the Ethiopians and are after them," said an official.

When Ahmedabad DRI had seized 115kg of leaves worth Rs 3 crore in 2017, Madras high court had struck down the case, stating that khat was not mentioned in the NDPS Act schedule.