

OF DRUGS, CHILDREN AND CUSTOMS CONTROLS By Jonathan Hore

Flip, flip, flip and another flip of a newspaper and all you read about is drugs. One wonders how cocaine, crack, marijuana and the rest of such drugs find their way through borders yet there is Customs Control. But as an ex-Customs official, I am not surprised as I am fully aware of some daring people called smugglers. What is disturbing is that some of the drugs find their way into school children's hands. Oooh, man! Drugs can destroy those who regard themselves as strong and mature. But what about a small little mind that is trying to fathom what life on this earth is all about? This mind has no clue about the challenges in life, especially that once hooked to drugs, their life may as well have been wasted for good.

SO, WHAT IS CUSTOMS CONTROL?

Customs control simply refers to the measures and procedures put in place by BURS in order to control the importation and exportation of goods. Before goods can be imported and exported, they should be declared for Customs purposes. This declaration is a formal document that is completed by the importer or exporter and it has to be examined and approved by BURS. Customs control is a key component of trade and is also used to detect the importation and exportation of illegal and controlled goods. Controlled goods are those that cannot be imported without a permit and these include animals, medicinal drugs, plants etc. But goods such as cocaine and marijuana are prohibited from being imported.

Customs control has many components, some of which are as follows:

- Designated Customs ports of entry: BURS is empowered to declare certain places as the official ports through which goods can be exported or imported. The importation/exportation of goods through undesignated places is a serious crime.
- Physical examinations: Customs officials are empowered to search vehicles, containers, bags and any other items used to carry goods passing through a port of entry. The obvious reason for these examinations is to enforce Customs controls and fight illegal imports. Physical examinations are mainly done through a Customs officer checking the goods by either opening the containers, bags, cars etc. However, physical examinations may also be extended to body searches but as one would expect, only female Customs officials are allowed to search female importers/exporters.
- Scanners: Most commercial imports come in large quantities and it is not efficient and feasible to have Customs officials search the goods through physical examinations. Chances are very high that importers/exporters may conceal prohibited or controlled goods inside other goods. This explains why BURS has scanners which are mainly used to examine commercial cargo.
- Customs patrols: These are patrols that are conducted by tax authorities to check whether Customs procedures are observed. One may have managed to smuggle goods through a port of entry but they may be stopped by BURS inland and get searched. Patrols can also be done in industries and homes after goods have been imported. BURS can visit importers to check whether they have all the required Customs documents for goods they imported.

SMUGGLERS BEATING CUSTOMS CONTROL

Smugglers are fully aware of the methods that are employed to enforce Customs controls and devise ways to try and beat them. This is why some controlled or prohibited goods find their way into the country despite all the Customs controls that are embarked on. The daring smugglers employ some of the following methods to try and beat the taxman:

- Use of undesignated ports of entry: Smugglers embark on dangerous missions of using unauthorized ports of entry and if they are not caught, they manage to get their goods through. But chances of getting caught are very high.
- Concealment: Some smugglers may pack drugs in bags used to carry say cement and these are put in a truck carrying real cement. This is why BURS has scanners, which are meant to pick concealed goods. Concealed commercial goods are easy to detect as the scanners are very effective. The most difficult concealments are the ones that are done by importers of small consignments where they may create a false compartment in a car and hide drugs there. Some even go to the extent of hiding the goods on their bodies or in their clothes. The most daring ones go to the extent of swallowing the goods just before they reach a port of entry. BURS needs to come up with innovative ways of combatting these daring schemers.

These are just some of the means which are used by smugglers to get controlled/illegal goods into the country. It is therefore imperative that BURS and other law-enforcement agencies be very up-to-date with new smugglings tactics in place at any given time.

Hoping that was insightful folks. As Yours Truly says goodbye, remember not to smuggle and always pay to Caesar what belongs to him. Cheers!