

Jet crew face fire over smuggled cigarettes

The two were caught with thousands of smokes on them. They planned to sell them in the UK where they cost thousands

ANEESH PHADNIS



Cigarette smuggling was injurious to their jobs

In a country where a pack of cigarettes cost Rs 440 (£ 6), smuggling them from India is perhaps the easiest way to make a quick buck. However, this cost two Jet Airways crew their jobs. They were apprehended at London's Heathrow airport on charges of smuggling cigarettes in February and May this year. The two were derostered on arrival in India and were served a letter seeking an explanation. Fearing termination, the crew members chose to resign.

The first incident occurred on February 21 when a crew member on flight no 9W 118 (Mumbai - London) was found carrying 9,000 cigarettes (45 cartons).

The second incident was on May 30 when a crew member on 9W 120 was found carrying 1,800 cigarettes with him (nine cartons). As per the United Kingdom customs regulation, a traveller to the European Union can carry 200 cigarettes (one carton). The entitlement for airline crew is the same.

Simon Barrett, a press officer in the UK Border Agency, which controls immigration and customs, confirmed the incidents. "Both members of crew were arrested and subsequently received a police caution," he stated but refused to give further details.

A source with the airline said, "In both the cases the crew were derostered on their arrival in India and were served a letter seeking an explanation. Fearing termination, the crew chose to resign."

Airline crew have to furnish details of goods carried by them in a customs declaration which is signed by the flight commander and handed over to the customs on arrival. "In these instances the Jet Airways crew had not declared the cigarettes they were carrying into London," the source said.

Jet Airways cabin crew line operations manual makes it clear that crew that violate customs regulations will face disciplinary action, including possible termination. Following the February incident the airline also issued a circular to its staff reiterating the custom regulations, it is learnt.

"Carrying cigarettes to London is lucrative. It is not a one-off incident and or peculiar to Jet Airways crew. Some crew members are known to carry a carton or two which may be permitted under the customs regulations of that country. The cartons are pooled and sold. The customs at Heathrow airport is generally lenient with airline crew and check their bags on a random basis or on specific information," a senior commander said.

In an email response Jet Airways said, "All airline staff are required to comply with the company's rules and regulations and with the customs and security laws of the countries that Jet Airways flies to. The airline, as a policy, has included these guidelines in the cabin crew line operations manual and issues reminders to all cabin crew from time to time. In accordance with the principles of natural justice and the employee code of conduct, the airline took appropriate action in the concerned matter."

