

Amnesty Scheme termed illegal

1,405 vehicles cleared against 61 CNICs: Suddle

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ISLAMABAD: Federal Tax Ombudsman (FTO) Dr Shoaib Suddle has said that 1,405 vehicles were cleared against 61 Computerised National Identity Card (CNIC) under the Vehicles Amnesty Scheme, 2013.

Talking to media persons here on Thursday, Dr Suddle said that the amnesty scheme was damning indictment of the integrity and professionalism of Pakistan Customs. "The situation demands effective accountability and action against all those involved in the scam. FTO office expects a paradigm shift the way FBR is being run under the leadership of the new Chairman FBR," he maintained.

He termed the amnesty scheme illegal, which caused billions of rupees losses to the country, adding that tampered and stolen vehicles were also cleared under the scheme.

According to the FTO report: 52 vehicles were cleared against CNIC no 54303-4578138-1, 51 vehicles were cleared against CNIC no 54400-0480365-1, 50 vehicles each were cleared against CNIC no 54201-7713423-3 and CNIC 42201-3286197-5. Suddle added that all the persons belonged to Balochistan while the vehicles were cleared at MCC Appraisalment Karachi instead of Quetta.

The FTO took suo motu notice

on April 1, 2013 of the issue on the basis of information that many vehicles were allowed clearance which were standing at the auction stage in Japan. Such scandalous action on the part of Customs indicated that the department was totally impervious to change, even in the aftermath of ISAF Scam—the mother of all scams, Dr Suddle stated.

The FTO investigation showed that 18 vehicles have been traced which were shipped from Japan for Dubai after expiry of the amnesty but were cleared by the Customs even before their arrival in Pakistan, adding that total number of so far confirmed 'ghost Vehicles' is 425, which have not yet arrived Pakistan but were cleared during the amnesty.

The FTO also found that almost one third of the vehicles were cleared without physical entry into the country as investigators proved that 407 vehicles were cleared which were still lying in an auction yard in Tokyo.

Under the vehicle amnesty scheme, 49,462 vehicles were cleared from March 5 to April 6, 2013 with collection of Rs 15.814 billion as customs duty. Another 887 vehicles were reported under process when the extended date of April 6 expired. In the last six schemes implemented from 1998 to 2007 total number of legalized vehicles from Peshawar Collectorate was

8,699 but the number of vehicles legalised under amnesty scheme of 2013 stands at 17,381 which is almost double of all the previous schemes.

About the mandatory condition of digital image of the vehicles, Suddle said that the compliance rate remained 5 percent in this regard. The amnesty scheme allowed reduction in duty and taxes in respect of smuggled vehicles up to 60 percent for cars and 72 percent for other vehicles plus 5 percent additional reduction for every subsequent year, he said.

He said that the Amnesty was launched on March 5, 2013. FBR issued clarifications/instructions on March 8, 2013 again amended on March 13, 2013. This manual couldn't reach all Collectorates in time. It was mandatory under the manual to issue computerised delivery orders but only few Collectorates complied and mostly manual delivery orders were issued. Provision for uploading of photograph of vehicles in the system was introduced on March 20, 2013 i.e. two weeks after the amnesty. No filter was applied for stolen and tampered vehicles. Massive procedural lapses were committed in every Collectorate. In Lahore Collectorate, however, no 'ghost vehicle' was found to have been cleared, based on limited information of auction/shipment available at this stage.