



Press Release
12.08.2021

Enforcement Directorate has conducted search operation at various premises of Villayutham, alleged kingpin of sea cucumber smuggling in Rameshwaram, Tamil Nadu on 9th August, 2021. The case involves serious environmental crime i.e. smuggling sea cucumber, endangered species along Sri Lankan border.

Known as the 'cleaners of the sea,' sea cucumbers play a vital role in maintaining health of marine ecosystem. Sea cucumbers, also called as Holothurians, are marine endangered species. They are important constituent of the coral ecosystem in the Gulf of Mannar. The product *Beche-de-mer* derived from processed sea cucumbers is commercially important and considered as a delicacy in China, Japan and Korea. Besides, the sea cucumber is known to have aphrodisiac qualities and the pharmacological properties.

In the year 2001, Government of India included all species of sea cucumbers under Schedule-I category of Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 and totally banned their collection. These animals have also been protected under Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

ED initiated investigation on the basis of 13 FIRs/Wild life cases filed against Villayutham. The residential premises of Villayutham, Hotel Raamajeyam owned by him at Rameshwaram were searched on 9th August, 2021 by The Enforcement Directorate. The operations resulted in seizure of large number of sale deeds, cash receipts, cheque books and other incriminating documents. Sale deeds papers and other documents seized during the search operation revealed the value of the assets of Villayutham to be around Rs. 5 Crore.

Further investigation is under progress.
