

**Anything to Declare? - And The History Unfolds!**

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**Anything to Declare? - And The History Unfolds!**

**By Sudipto Banerjee, Assistant Editor**

**THE** Central Board of Excise and Customs has come out with an excellent limited edition of Coffee Table book **“Anything to Declare?”**

encompassing the rich and hoary past of the Customs Department on the occasion of commemoration of 50 years of the enactment of the Customs Act, 1962. The book was launched on July 26, 2012, the Golden Jubilee date, in the august presence of Hon’ble Prime Minister of India, and including other dignitaries from the Ministry of Finance at Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi.

The book opens up with the chapter **“A Journey in Time”**

. As the name suggests, this Chapter effortlessly takes a reader down the memory lane of history dating back to ancient Indus valley civilisation, medieval India followed by the East India Company, and finally the British Rule, reflecting the origin of culture of modern customs, and the way it flourished and matured under different regimes. This chapter contains a brilliant artist’s impression of the ancient town called Lothal, considered as the oldest port, existing during the ancient Indus Valley civilization around 2400 BC. This magnificent town was discovered; only after its remains were excavated in the year 1954. The artist in this picture has beautifully managed to capture the age old presence of sea borne trade and customs in India. Then the chapter proceeds to describe the history of customs houses in Presidencies, starting from the first Customs House in Calcutta, set up in February 1819. One can also treasure a rare picture of the Customs House wharf, Calcutta dating back to 1893.

The next chapter **“Who we are”**

is an eye-opening insight into the history of the Customs Department, the manner it functions, the pan India presence of customs offices, and last but not the least, the story of those audacious Customs officers who not only relentlessly served the Department, but even went ahead in laying down their lives in the urge of defending the interests of the nation.

~~The chapter shows the overwhelming presence of the customs stations guarding and protecting over 22,000 Kms of~~

land borders and coast line. As one reads this chapter, the reader comes to know that, be it Indo-Bangladesh border, Indo-Myanmar border or diametrically across Indo-Pakistan border, the customs officers are omnipresent, successfully accomplishing the uphill task of enforcing spirit of the custom laws. The chapter also covers the interesting journey of the administrative set up of the Customs Department beginning from the constitution of Imperial Customs Services during the British era to the present Indian Revenue Service. There is also a lucid schematic presentation for readers to quickly understand the entire organisational structure of the Department right from the level of the Ministry of Finance till the field officers. Then, the Chapter has a collection of knowledge enriching pictures of latest technology, infrastructure like fleet of patrol boats, interceptor boats, container scanning vehicles, etc., demonstrating the appropriate preparedness of the Department to strongly encounter any ground situation arising on a daily basis. Finally, the chapter throws light on the contribution of several great personalities like Leslie Claudius, Gurbux Singh, Anju Bobby George, Gulshan Rai, to name a few, who have not only earned glory for their country in the domain of sports, but have also been a part of the Department, adding to its unrivalled rich legacy.

The chapter of **“Grandeur in Brick and Stone”**

Â would be nothing less than a sumptuous treat for the eye-balls of the TIOL Netizens. This chapter presents some of the awesome collections of pictures of customs houses all across the country established in picturesque and breathtaking locales. The fusion of amazing French and British architecture employed in creating these structures, only reflects the glaring rich history and grandeur of the Department. The chapter also compiles several magnificent oil canvas paintings capturing the historical background of custom house in India, are only bound to mesmerize each reader, compelling them to turn back the pages again and again.

The book in the chapter **“Reaching out”**

Â presents the e-initiatives of the Customs Department, the overwhelming presence of information technology and several accolades won by the Department across the globe.Â

The second last chapter **“Adrenaline in Plenty”**

Â would actually rush the adrenaline of the TIOL Netizens. This chapter unfolds pictures of some of the rarest of rare antiques and artefacts seized in operations, including the handwritten copy of **“Ain-e-Akbari”** by Abul Fazl, which all are now safely preserved in the Customs Museum, Goa. The chapter does reflect the sad picture of a man’s greed that is willing to trade in every possible thing, including natural resources, animals, narcotics, etc., in the haste of earning money. The chapter would be an eye opener for the TIOL Netizens to see some of the most shocking and incredible practices adopted by the smugglers in commissioning of their crimes. But, then the book also stands as a witness to the steadfast vigilance of the Customs Department who have nabbed these heinous crime perpetrators and brought them to justice.

Finally, the book ends at **“Transcending Borders”**

Â which shows the active role of the Customs Department in this era of globalisation by being a signatory to several bilateral agreements, international conventions, and being a member of the prestigious World Customs Organisation.

This book **“Anything to Declare?”**

Â hardly requires any recommendations to the TIOL Netizens, as one cannot simply afford to be deprived of the pleasure of travelling into the prehistoric times and again coming back to the present, reading this wonderful limited edition over a cup of nice steaming coffee. TIOL wholeheartedly appreciates the efforts and contribution put in by each person, who has been instrumental in bringing out this magnificent book. It must be admitted that, it is a treat to

script a book review for a publication like this.