

Englishman's gift to a poor Indian gets stuck in Customs; Mr FM, PI do something!

By TIOL News Service

NEW DELHI, JAN 19 : Francesca Poelman,

a philanthropic Englishman wanted to give a surprise Christmas gift to a poor Indian, Repalemba Jamir who lives in Shillong. Jamir's father is dead and his mother ekes out a living by selling candles. He could have never dreamed of buying a guitar. The poor Englishman not knowing the ways of Indian Customs, decided to bring a little cheer to poor Jamir's life. He bought a second hand guitar and sent it across through a church in Shillong as a very big surprise Christmas gift for Jamir. But Kolkotta Customs does not understand such sentiments. They want Jamir to pay Rs. 40,000/- for the guitar.

Fran Poelman writes to **TIOL**

that neither Jamir, nor the Church through which the guitar was gifted can afford such a huge amount for the guitar. Is Poelman rich? No, He is only good! He tells us that even he can't afford to pay this amount. **He bought a second hand guitar as a gift for an unfortunate Indian.**

But our Customs doesn't work on sentiments; they do on stiff rules. Now Poelman does not know what to do. He, the Church and Jamir **cannot afford to pay the 40,000 demanded by Kolkotta Customs.** So the only option is to send the guitar back.

The Customs have a system called *facility*

under which if you are big enough, or know the big people, you can walk past the Customs in our Airports with a little more than the allowed free baggage and may be a couple of more scotch bottles than permitted. Who are these people who avail the Customs

facility? - of evading a small amount of Customs duty? The rich and powerful of the society, who only get thrilled by getting the customs *facility*.

A Sachin Tendulkar can get a Ferrari imported free of duty, but a guitar gifted by a poor Englishman to a poor Indian! No chance! We follow the law strictly.

Please could you help me? pleads Mr Fran Poelman (See full text of his letter as given below).

TIOL appeals to the Finance Minister, the Chairman, CBEC and the Chief Commissioner, Kolkotta Customs to help. Please hand over that guitar to Repalemba Jamir. Much more than customs duty is involved here.

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To whom it may concern,

Please, could you help me?

At the beginning of December 2004 I sent a guitar as a gift to a friend, Repalemba Jamir. He lives in a town called Shillong in Meghalaya. I had bought the guitar in February last year. In December I wanted to send it to my friend in India as his father has died and he has absolutely no way of being able to buy a guitar for himself now that his mother has very little money to spend. The small amount she does make selling candles just helps them to make ends meet. I decided that I wanted to bless Repalemba and send him the guitar I had bought in February as a **very big surprise for Christmas**. When I spoke to the company here in England, Ocean International, based in Southampton, they assured me that there would be no problem in sending the guitar and that as I was sending as a gift to Repalemba through his church in Shillong then the customs tax needed to be paid should not be too much.

However, the guitar is still at the Federal Express depot in Calcutta and the customs official has reported to Repalemba that they will not deliver the guitar until he pays Rs 40000/-. This works out to be approximately £550. This is terrible as the guitar and the accessories I sent with it are valued at no more than £600 now that is second hand.

I have spoken to some of the Indian traders I know here in Essex and they informed me that a mistake must have been made because this amount is much too much.

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~~I would be grateful if you could let me know if the amount that the customs officials are asking for in Calcutta is correct. My friend cannot pay this money.~~

neither can the church we are sending it to and neither can I as it cost me quite a lot of money to send it in the first place. Please could you assist me in this matter? I would be grateful if you could deal with my request in writing, either by fax or letter, so that I can forward any information you give me to Repalembe. **I fear that if this is the correct amount then we will have to ask Federal Express to return the guitar back to England.**

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Yours faithfully,

Francesca Poelman

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