

2 Koreans held for smuggling in city; 7kg gold, ₹11.16cr seized

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Chennai: Directorate of Revenue Intelligence officials on Thursday busted a major city-based gold smuggling racket, arresting five people including a Chennai textile merchant and two South Koreans. DRI sleuths seized 7kg gold and ₹11.16 crore in cash during the operation.

The racket involved South Koreans bringing gold from Hong Kong and being paid crores of rupees through hawala transactions by the businessman, said DRI officers who declined to identify the arrested accused. However, Chennai police intelligence sources said two Korean women were Noon Sonimi, 39, and Kweon Mihwa, 47.

While an official DRI release said sleuths maintained vigil at a prominent hotel in Mylapore on Thursday morning, police intelligence said it was Hotel Saveria. When the businessman emerged from the lobby, a team of officers intercepted him and conducted a search.

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Smuggling gold a routine, bizman admits to DRI

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A leather pouch he was carrying had six one-kg gold bars with foreign markings, officials said. When questioned he said the gold was smuggled in through Chennai airport by two South Korean nationals who were staying in the hotel. When questioned in their hotel room, the two South Koreans confessed to bringing the gold from Hong Kong on Wednesday for a monetary consideration, without declaring it.

The DRI officials then conducted searches at multiple premises in Chennai linked to the businessman. At a textile shop owned by him, they recovered a smuggled 1 kg gold bar and ₹5.16 crore cash. The gold seized was



The seized cash

valued at ₹2.2 crore. At some of the residences of the businessman's aides, about ₹6 crore was recovered and two associates, who admitted to regularly assisting the businessman in delivering gold and currency for hawala operations, were nabbed. The officers also seized a Swift Dzire used to transport the gold.

The businessman admitted to DRI officials that he regularly received gold smuggled by passengers who visited Chennai and stayed at prominent hotels.

He and his associates said they would regularly distribute the gold and cash in the black market, and that the ₹11.16 crore in cash recovered was sale proceeds of the smuggled gold they planned to remit abroad through hawala channels.