

Punjab: Six 'Chennai Cartel' members get 10 years in jail

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PATIALA/PANCHKULA: Six members of the 'Chennai cartel,' including a woman from Myanmar, who were involved in drug trade inside and outside the country, were convicted by the court of special NDPS judge Sanjay Sandhir in Panchkula on Monday.

The five accused — M Prabhu, R Shiva Kumar, RV Shanmugam, S Manni and R V Venkatesh — were sentenced to 10 years in jail. The Myanmarese national, Cer Boih, alias Cherry, was sentenced to eight years in jail. A fine of Rs. 1 lakh each also has been imposed on all the six convicts.

The prosecution had submitted that the cartel was actively involved in illicit drug-trafficking and Cer Boih of Myanmar and Rehman of Malaysia were international faces of the gang. The kingpin, Ashwani Chhabra, who runs Shifa Biotech Delhi, and other members of the gang are yet to be arrested and have been declared proclaimed offenders.

The case against the five accused was registered by the Patiala police on June 28, 2014 at Tripuri police station and four of them were arrested on June 30, 2014 near Shambhu on Punjab-Haryana border, according to the then SSP Patiala Hardial Mann. A huge cache of drugs, including 3.5 kg diphenoxylate and 50 kg pseudoephedrine, and Rs 1.6 crore in cash was recovered. On the information provided by these four, Cherry was arrested from Delhi on July 1, 2014. The cops had recovered Rs 4.98 lakh from her along with a Maruti Suzuki SX4 and fake documents, including passports and PAN cards. Shanmugam was arrested by the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) Delhi in 2008 from international airport in Delhi with 11 kg ketamine.

According to investigating officer, Shaminder Singh, the six convicts were members of the Chennai cartel and were supplying drugs to former wrestler and former cop Jagdish Bhola. He said a case under Sections 9/9A/21/22/25/25A/27/29 of NDPS Act and Sections 471 and 489 of the IPC had been registered against the six in Patiala. The case was initially heard at the Patiala court but later the Supreme Court had transferred it to special designated court at Panchkula.

Known to be operating in close association with Jagdish Bhola, the Chennai cartel was facing multiple charges in various cases registered by the DRI at Delhi and Chennai and the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) besides having been booked by the Patiala police. They were a part of the larger drug racket being operated by cartels based in Delhi and Mumbai.

According to sources, the six convicts were trying to introduce methamphetamine, a highly addictive drug which is said to be more potent than heroin and is widely produced by the Mexican cartels and used in the USA, in East Asia. The sources said Bhola had learnt how to produce methamphetamine from a drug operator based in Hong Kong and he was planning to produce and sell this drug in Punjab.

Bhola has already been convicted by the Punjab CBI court and is under imprisonment for his involvement in the drug trade.