

MUMBAI

DRI busts gold smuggling gang, uncovers new route

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Gold worth ₹2.3 cr. recovered from four passengers at LTT

Mumbai: The arrest of four men from Kerala in the city has led to the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) uncovering a new route for gold smuggling: from Dubai to Kathmandu by air, and then into India through the free Indo-Nepal border by road. The gold is then sent to Mumbai by train.

On Friday, the DRI busted a gang that had smuggled 6.96 kg of gold bars worth ₹2.3 crore from Dubai via Nepal. Acting on a tip-off, officials laid a trap at Lokmanya Tilak Terminus, Kurla, where they intercepted Habeeb Edaparambil, Sarfuddin Kothradan, Mansoor Pulikodan and Jafar Parakkal. All four had arrived by the Patliputra Express.

A search of their baggage resulted in the recovery of the bars with foreign markings. Officials said this was smugglers' new modus operandi. A scrutiny of their passports revealed they had arrived from Dubai. "They landed in Nepal, from where they sneaked into India by crossing the border using bogus Aadhaar cards. They strapped the bars to specially made cavities in their trouser waistbands. Each bar weighed 10 tolas," a DRI officer said.

Officials recovered train tickets issued to Kothradan and Pulikodan. The accused in their statement to DRI confessed to having travelled to Dubai on May 13 via Nepal, from where two Nepali nationals accompanied them to Dubai. "Based on their interrogation, the mastermind and an accomplice who had come to the Kalbadevi market to receive the gold from these three were also held," the official said.

Investigations revealed the carriers had gone to Dubai in search of odd jobs and were promised ₹20,000 each for smuggling gold to India. All five accused have been sent to judicial custody till June 2.

The DRI, meanwhile, said the monetary worth of seized smuggled items including gold, red sanders, cigarettes and electronic gadgets had increased by 11.69% from ₹209.23 crore in 2016-17 to ₹233.68 crore in 2017-18.