

Gold 'courier' arrested by DRI was part of Chennai smuggling gang

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HYDERABAD: Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) sleuths suspect a 'courier', who was caught trying to smuggle in two kilo gold at RGI Airport, was part of a Chennai-based smuggling gang.

Though the gold was concealed by another gang member, who travelled in the aircraft on its international leg from Sharjah to Thiruvananthapuram, the smugglers retrieved it during the aircraft's sixth and final domestic flight for the day between Indore-Hyderabad, the closest destination to Chennai, the gang's base.

TRACKING THE GOLD MOVEMENT

► The gang members note the aircraft's unique ID number to see its complete schedule and select their target airport to take the gold out from the aircraft

► In a recent case of gold seizure in Chennai, one of the gang's members had picked up the gold from the aircraft which was on its 11th domestic leg post-international touchdown. In the latest case, the aircraft was on its fifth domestic trip following the international journey

► The gang members select smaller airports with low surveillance or late night flights or busy slots of a particular airport when footfall will be very high to escape detection during pick-up



The DRI had arrested one of the 'couriers' at Rajiv Gandhi International Airport and had seized nearly 2kg of gold which he had concealed in his shoes

► If the adjudicating authority, who is the additional commissioner of customs, decides to confiscate the gold, then the accused has to pay a penalty imposed by the authority

Keeping a watch on the smuggling gang's activities, a DRI team intercepted the Delhi-based smuggler, who arrived at the RGI Airport by an Indigo flight from Indore in the wee hours of Sunday. The DRI sleuths seized gold biscuits weighing 1.99 kilo, concealed by the courier in his shoes.

The accused confessed to the DRI interrogators that he had picked up the yellow metal left in the aircraft by his gang members. The DRI team analysed the data and found out that the aircraft's India-bound international journey on Saturday was from Sharjah to Thiruvananthapuram.

After the aircraft reached Thiruvananthapuram from Sharjah at 9.06am on Saturday, it continued to operate on the domestic circuit for the rest of the day.

From Thiruvananthapuram, the plane operated as a domestic carrier to Hyderabad and reached the RGI Airport at 12.34pm. However, the gang did not pick up the consignment during the trip, suspecting surveillance on the first domestic journey after an international trip.

The aircraft then flew to Ahmedabad (landed at 6.29 pm), then on to Delhi (8.40pm) and Indore (10.48pm). The last domestic leg of the aircraft was from Indore to Hyderabad and the gang member boarded the flight and picked up the gold. After the plane landed at Hyderabad around 12.40am, the DRI team, which was waiting for the gang member, arrested him and seized the gold.

"The accused claimed he picked up the gold biscuits left by a gang member under the seat, but we suspect it was concealed inside an oxygen mask cavity inside a toilet," a DRI official said.

The DRI team also has sufficient evidence to indicate that the arrested accused, who is from Delhi, was working for the Chennai-based smuggling gang. "The flight from Indore was late by almost two hours on Saturday night. We believe the accused was supposed to either take the gold directly to Chennai by road or hand it over to another gang member, who would then take it Tamil Nadu capital," a DRI official said.

Revenue Intelligence seizes Rs 66 lakh worth gold smuggled from gulf countries at Hyderabad airport

Investigation had revealed that the passenger had retrieved the said gold from inside the flight, where it was earlier left behind by another passenger who was travelling from Sharjah to Trivandrum.



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HYDERABAD: There is a new modus operandi in town for gangs to smuggle in gold from the gulf countries. Case in point, the gold bars worth Rs 66 lakh seized by the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence at the RGI Airport on Sunday. A preliminary investigation had revealed that the passenger had retrieved the said gold from inside the flight, where it was earlier left behind by another passenger who was travelling from Sharjah to Trivandrum on an international leg.

The attempt, however, was definitely not the first of its kind. At least four cases with similar modus operandi have been registered in major international airports across the country in January alone, the latest being at the Chennai International Airport on Monday. A rather safe method for smugglers and agents, such cases are hard to detect unless there is a tip-off, officials involved in the investigation say. "Even the airline crew or other passengers cannot identify where the gold is concealed," they claim.

The passenger arrested at the RGI airport on Sunday had retrieved two gold bars weighing more than 1.90 kilos from an Indigo Airlines flight that was flying from Indore to Hyderabad. In fact, the flight had already made domestic runs to Mumbai, Delhi, Indore before reaching Hyderabad. The Delhi-based accused, a plumber by profession, was merely tasked with the duty of bringing the gold out of the aircraft. Inquiries revealed that he was offered a commission worth less than one per cent of the value of the smuggled gold. He was supposed to deliver the gold to a receiver in the city and go back to Indore, by road or rail.

Similarly, the air passenger from whom gold was seized at the Chennai airport on Monday, had boarded the domestic flight from Kolkata. The flight was making its second domestic leg, after an international leg from a gulf country. On January 12, gold bars weighing 2 kg were seized from a passenger at the Delhi International airport. The flight had just completed an international leg from Abu Dhabi to Mumbai and a domestic leg from Mumbai to Delhi.