

# DRI: Probe into gold smuggling case progressing

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Thiruvananthapuram: The directorate of revenue intelligence (DRI) officials probing the gold smuggling case via Trivandrum International Airport have said that the investigation was halfway through with almost all key members of the racket being arrested. On Tuesday, the probe team had arrested the ninth accused in the case, Sindhu, 40, of Kazhakkootam, who operated as a carrier of the racket.

A DRI source said that at least four more carriers, who have been identified, are currently absconding. They are Arjun, Ruben Thomas, Deepu and his wife Chithra Deepu. All of them are closely associated with three key members of the racket — Prakash Thampi, Biju Mohan and Vishnu Somasundaram. Arjun is the neighbour of Praksh Thampi at Pangodu in the city.

Deepu and Chithra Deepu are neighbours of Biju Mohanan at Kazhakkootam and Ruben Thomas is an ex-employee of Somasundaram. Besides these four, they have also identified four carriers, Akash Shaji, Shajahan, Abu Becker and Sangeetha, a north Indian woman, who are all currently in Dubai. Efforts were on to deport them back to the country. Other than these, those who are yet to be arrested are the owners of jewellery chain for whom the gold was smuggled.

The DRI officials said that all people who acted as carriers were recruited by Biju Mohanan or Somasundaram. All of them already maintained personal relationships with the two. It is learned that there were a total of around 20 carriers in the racket. They have made more than 100 trips among them and smuggled more than 1,000kg of gold.

“It has come to our notice that all carriers had declared the gold before the customs officials in Dubai. We have requested them to share the list of persons from Thiruvananthapuram, who had declared large quantities of gold in the recent months, but, they are yet to respond,” the official said.

Of the nine people arrested so far, eight have secured bail. Sindhu, who was arrested on Tuesday, is under judicial custody.