

## Myanmar major contributor of smuggled gold to India

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2

4



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**Guwahati:** If the records of seizure of gold by customs and other related agencies in the Northeast were any indicator, Myanmar, which was earlier known for the trade of illegal arms, is now turning into a major transit point of smuggled gold to India.

The customs sleuths seized 3,223 kg gold worth Rs 974 crore in 2017-18 which is the only 5-10 per cent of the total illegal trade that could be detected and seized.

According to a conservative estimate of Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI), the total market of smuggled gold in India is nothing less than Rs 9,000 crore.

Indicating that the major contributor to the market of smuggled gold in India is Myanmar, superintendent of customs in Imphal division stationed at Moreh Mr T Bijando Singh admits, “Gold is the biggest contraband from Myanmar.”

Gold enters India as biscuits, each weighing 166 gm and with no mark of origin, from deposits in Kachin and Kayin states and the four regions of Mandalay, Sagaing, Bago and Tanintharyi.

Pointing out that these gold consignments change hand quickly obviously to evade seizure, intelligence sources said that the first stop is Imphal, from where gold is sent out — by road through Dimapur in Nagaland or Silchar in Assam and then by rail or air to Kolkata or New Delhi.

From these points, it is distributed to other parts of India. Most gold seizures by the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) have been from Kolkata, Mumbai, Chennai and Delhi, which are big consumption centres of smuggled gold. The seizures of gold have also revealed that the gold smuggled from Myanmar is of very high quality — with a purity of 99.76 per cent.

Informing that there are three important factors that makes smuggling of gold through Northeast more lucrative, the sources in the intelligence agencies said, “Myanmar’s gold is cheaper, at least Rs 400-500 lower per gram than Indian gold. Import duties in India are high — 10 per cent customs duty and 3 per cent GST. Myanmar does not allow trade of gold in its native form, while the product’s demand is very high in India.”

Sources claimed that a share of the gold exported by India to the Middle East is from the gold stashed originally smuggled in from Myanmar.

India and Myanmar share a 1,643-km-long border, along four Indian states – Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. Two routes that cut through this border — the old Tamu-Moreh-Imphal trajectory in Manipur, which goes through a vast expanse of unguarded but inaccessible area, and the Zokhatwar route in Mizoram — are popular for trade and transit, both legal and illegal.

On the route from Tamu in Myanmar to Moreh in Manipur, there is a security checkpost every 30 km from Moreh to Imphal. Even after security checkpost, all smuggling cartels prefer the Moreh route.

Security agencies keeping a close watch on this route said, “Moreh is the favoured entry point for contraband from Myanmar.

In fact, lower rung officials of Myanmar are also found to have been extending help to these smugglers as in return they get a fair amount of share.”

Indicating that smugglers have also created a cartel of carriers comprising the local youths from northeastern states as well as from northern India, security sources said that it has become the source of employment for many youths.