

Afghan man arrested with foreign currencies worth Rs 11 cr

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IN POSSIBLY the largest such haul, an Afghan national was arrested with foreign currencies worth Rs 10.86 crore in his check-in baggage at Kochi International Airport on Wednesday.

Yousuf Muhammed Siddique, 33, had boarded Air India's Delhi-Kochi-Dubai flight from Delhi on Tuesday. He and other passengers were asked to get off the plane in Kochi after the plane developed a technical snag. They were put in different flights. Siddique was intercepted by Customs officials when he was about to board an Emirates flight to Dubai Wednesday morning.

Customs Commissioner (Kochi) Sumit Kumar said an investigation into whether there was a breach of security and screening protocols in Delhi has been started. "The Afghan national clearing security screening in Delhi is a serious issue. I am not speculating anything. We would see whether someone helped him. All agencies concerned have been informed," Kumar said.

He said the chief security officer of Air India was asked to give an explanation on how the man was cleared. "If today, it is foreign currency, tomorrow it can be anything," said Kumar.

He said Siddique came to India a few months ago on a business visa. He appeared to be a professional carrier of the foreign currency racket, he said. "A frequent traveller, he has smuggled foreign currencies in the past also. We are also looking into how he got a business visa. The currencies seized were US Dollars and Saudi Riyals worth Rs 10.86 crore. This could be one of the largest seizure of foreign currency in the country," Kumar said.

The commissioner said that during the financial year 2017-18, the Air Customs in Kochi had registered 254 cases related to foreign currency, smuggling of commercial goods and gold.
