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## 3 airport staff held for aiding smugglers

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Trichy: Three contract employees of a ground handling agency functioning at the Trichy international airport were arrested by DRI officials on Wednesday for allegedly helping smugglers bring 6.3 kg of gold worth over Rs 1.90 crore out of the terminal building. All the three have been lodged at the Trichy central prison after being produced before the judicial magistrate court I. According to sources, DRI officials received information that a smuggling syndicate had been operating at the international airport. Subsequently, the officials kept watch on the security hold area of customs at the terminal building. They also had vital information that the valuable was being brought by Malindo Air from Kuala Lumpur which was to land at 10.35 pm.

However, despite maintaining hawk eye vigil and frisking, they could not locate any suspicious passenger from the particular flight. On tightening their vigil, the DRI officials grew suspicious of three ground handling staff reportedly working with Bhadra International India Private Limited.

All three of them were apprehended while they were about to hand over the yellow metal to an unidentified person waiting outside the terminal building. On interrogation, they were identified as Mohammed Sharif, 23, of Pudukkottai, Pradeep Sowrirajan, 20, of Pattukottai in Thanjavur district and Mahimai Prabhu, 22, of Theni district.

The officials recovered the gold in the form of cut pieces packed in 46 small packets from the trio. Following this, all the three were handed over to customs officials who in turn questioned them further. Customs officials also detained the person who was waiting outside the terminal to receive the gold and have intensified investigations.

Foreign currencies were also recovered from him, sources said. The 10% customs duty and 3% GST on gold import have made

smuggling a lucrative proposition, as the smugglers can make a profit of over Rs 3 lakh per kilogram of smuggled gold, sources said.