

121 arrested under Cofeposa in last 5 years

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NEW DELHI: In the last five years, Central agencies, primarily the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence and Customs, have arrested 121 persons under the stringent Cofeposa Act. Last year was the highest with 51 detention orders issued under Cofeposa and 43 persons arrested so far, some still absconding.

Treated as preventive detention, a person arrested under the Conservation of Foreign Exchange and Prevention of Smuggling Activities (Cofeposa) Act is sent behind bars for minimum one year. Most of these detentions are for increased smuggling activities and operation of foreign syndicates in India bringing in gold, narcotics, arms and ammunitions.

In one such case, the DRI had recently arrested a Kerala resident who is considered to be the kingpin of the smuggling syndicate operating from Dubai. The Dubai syndicate had smuggled in around three tons of gold worth over Rs 1,000 crore through sea, imported as brass scrap at Mundra and Jamnagar ports in Gujarat, in the last one year. At least 14 persons have been arrested in the case.

Investigation later revealed that the kingpin from Kerala had a Pakistani link which has other intelligence agencies evincing interest in the case, including RAW (Research & Analysis Wing) and the Intelligence Bureau, both probing the terror financing angle and if arms and ammunitions have also been brought into the country as part of the illegal shipments.

The Cofeposa orders are issued in extra ordinary cases, only as a last resort where it may affect the country's security. The government has designated a joint secretary level officer in the Central Economic Intelligence Bureau, under the

finance ministry, to strictly review the proposals from Customs, DRI and Enforcement Directorate and issue such orders. The states are also empowered to issue detention orders under Cofeposa, but only by a designated officer not below the rank of Secretary.

Once arrested under Cofeposa, the accused is completely immobilized with all his operations frozen and bank accounts attached. During 2018-19, the CEIB had issued 51 detention orders under the act. This was highest in the last five years with 93 orders issued in the previous four years together — 30 in 2014-15; 32 in 2015-16; 7 in 2016-17 and 24 in 2017-18.

In November last year, the DRI had, in a joint operation with the Army at the international border in Akhnoor sector of J&K, carried out an operation in which one terrorist was killed while others managed to escape leaving behind huge cache of arms and ammunition. After neutralising the infiltrator at a forward location in Gigril in the Akhnoor sector, the joint team of the Army and DRI had seized an AK-56, five pistols, 15 hand grenades grenade launchers, 12 detonators of IED and 234 rounds of ammunition.

Later, the investigation revealed that Pakistan was using several launch pads along the LoC to push in terrorist with arms and narcotics to self-finance terror activities in the Valley.