

Bengaluru: Smuggling kingpin who slipped in gold worth Rs 70 crore nabbed at KIA

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BENGALURU: A smuggler from Kerala, who successfully slipped in gold worth Rs 70 crore from the Gulf through Kempegowda International Airport (KIA) in five months in 2018, was nabbed by Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) sleuths at the city airport last Friday.

Shihabudheen Thadathil, 46, landed in the city from Dubai, unaware that a look-out circular (LOC) had been issued against him.

Sources with the DRI's Bengaluru unit said Shihabudheen, who is from Koduvally town in Kozhikode, Kerala, was apprehended late night when he landed at KIA. Immigration authorities at the airport inspected his passport and found an LOC issued towards it.

The DRI was alerted and a team reached KIA and apprehended him.

Most-wanted criminal

The Kerala man, according to the enforcement agency, was one of the most-wanted criminals for an international gold smuggling trade between the Gulf cities and Bengaluru. "Between June and October 2018 alone, Shihabudheen managed to smuggle in 200kg of gold from the Gulf via Bengaluru airport through carriers, whom he'd pay a small fee for the job. The smuggling was mainly done by concealing gold paste in the rectum. The metal was brought in a paste form to Bengaluru and later melted and illegally sold as bars," said an investigating officer.

In late 2018, a gang of 10 men was nabbed at KIA with 10 kg gold. Later, this was found to be Shihabudheen's handiwork. When DRI tried to arrest him, he fled the country and was camped in Dubai, from where he had been running a huge gold-smuggling racket, sources added.

Humble beginnings

Shihabudheen, the kingpin of one of the biggest and most notorious international gold-smuggling rackets, started as a shopkeeper in his hometown two decades ago before leaving for Dubai to work as a salesman at a supermarket. "After a decade, he developed strong connections in Dubai and started smuggling gold to India. Today, his net worth runs into crores as he has numerous establishments and homes in Bengaluru, Kozhikode and Kochi. Soon after the big bust of 2018, we got an LOC issued in his name, but he managed to evade us for over a year," the DRI officer added.

On Friday, Shihabudheen was interrogated by the DRI, who established that he indeed orchestrated an elaborate smuggling operation for the last few years with Bengaluru city as the transit point. He was later remanded in custody and sent to Bengaluru central prison. The DRI team will seek his custody to further probe the smuggling racket and to unearth links to more cities, said sources.