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From: Sultan Bin Sulayem
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Police stop Dh6m gold thieves in mid-flight

Wafa Issa

Last Updated: November 11, 2009 12:20AM UAE / November 10, 2009 8:20PM GMT

DUBAI // The attempted heist involved three continents, five suspects, one jeweller and a suitcase filled with 25 gold bars valued at Dh6 million (US\$1.6m).

And it took Dubai Police less than 48 hours to apprehend the suspects.

The suspects - four Mexicans and a Costa Rican - entered the UAE on October 26 and are alleged to have robbed a jeweller at Dubai International Airport three days later.

Hours after they took the case, police say, the group shipped the gold to Costa Rica, drove to Abu Dhabi and boarded a flight for Hong Kong.

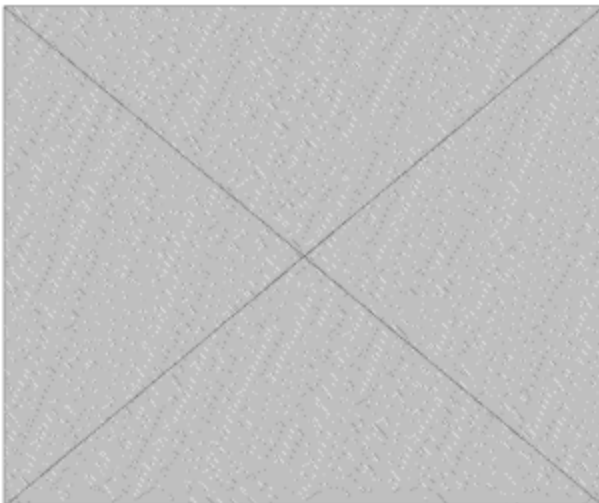
They made their getaway flight, but before it landed, the police had found them out.

Authorities in Hong Kong were alerted, and the suspects were apprehended when they arrived and forced on to a return flight.

After landing in the capital on October 31, they were arrested, interrogated and their case was eventually turned over to the Public Prosecution, according to police records. Their first court appearance has yet to be determined.

The gold was also recovered after police learned the suspects had hidden the bars in electronic equipment and sent them off, via courier, to Costa Rica. The package was intercepted in Europe after Dubai Police notified authorities there.

The suspects, three men and two women, had entered the country specifically to carry out the theft, said Brig Khalil al Mansouri, the director of the General Department for Criminal Investigation at Dubai Police.



"They were able to plan for their crime as they tracked the jeweller at Naif Gold Souk," he said. "The jeweller usually transported gold bars from Dubai to other countries to make jewellery and then transport them back to Dubai to sell them."

Brig al Mansouri said this was not the first trip for the gang to the UAE, but it was the first time they had committed an offence.

Police say upon arrival, the gang put the jeweller under surveillance. On October 29, they say, the gang snatched

the jeweller's bag while he was looking for a trolley at the airport.

The victim did not see any of the suspects, so police got their first lead by scanning Dubai airport's surveillance cameras.

A gold-coloured Honda Accord rental car parked close to the victim's car aroused their suspicions.

"Usually criminals use rental cars when trying to carry out a crime, so we started to survey all the rental gold Honda Accords, model 2009," said Lt Col Ahmed al Merri, head of the criminal investigation division and the supervisor of the investigation.

A check with rental agencies revealed there were 358 such cars in the country, and 42 patrols were assigned to check on them.

"This led us to a car which was rented Police stop Dh6m gold thieves in mid-flight

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A check with rental agencies revealed there were 358 such cars in the country, and 42 patrols were assigned to check on them.

"This led us to a car which was rented by a man who gave false information to the car rental," Lt Col al Merri said.

"After questioning the car rental employees we found the man was Mexican."

Police then ran a security check on all Mexicans who had recently entered the country, discovering the man in question had entered on a group ticket through DIR with the four others.

Police found the same group had bought tickets to Hong Kong from Abu Dhabi, and the wanted persons department took the steps to issue an arrest warrant.

The flight from Abu Dhabi to Hong Kong had been in the air for about 90 minutes when the suspects were determined to be on it, and was scheduled to land more than six and a half hours later, said Brig al Mansouri.

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