

LTTE PRIME SUSPECTS IN TRANSPORTING 3 TONS OF COCAINE IN SUBMARINE

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Four men, including a Sri Lankan Tamil named Rajakumar Rajadurai were in Federal Court in Tampa, Florida in the United States accused of trying to smuggle cocaine in a semi-submersible home made submarine.

It was not known whether the 52 year old Sri Lankan Tamil, who claimed that he was a resident alien of cocaine producing South American state of Columbia was in anyway connected with the Sri Lankan terrorist group the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam(LTTE).

There had been earlier attempts which were unsuccessful for the LTTE to get involved in the cocaine business in Columbia. Adelmo Torres-Aguirre, a 32-year-old resident of Colombia, Abimelec Murillosquera, a 41-year-old resident of Colombia, Robis Osuel Solis-Caceres, a 42-year-old resident of Guatemala, and Rajakumar Rajadurai, a 52-year-old Sri Lankan who is a resident alien of Colombia are all charged with violations of the Maritime Drug Law Enforcement Act.

A U.S. Coast Guard cutter spotted them in their semi-submersible boat off the coast of Costa Rica last month. Boarding crews found 7000 pounds of cocaine and a loaded AK-47. The four were arrested and brought to the United States to face charges. The boat will eventually be brought to the United States as evidence, the court was told.

They are charged with conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute 5 or more kilograms of cocaine, and aiding and abetting in the intent to distribute 5 or more kilograms of cocaine. If convicted, they could get a maximum punishment of life in prison and a fine of US \$4-million.

The US Attorney's office prosecuting said the amount of cocaine found in the home made submarine amounted to nearly three tons. The case was investigated by the Operation Panama Express task force, a six-year-long Tampa-based investigation that targets cocaine traffickers in the eastern Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean. Many of the cases, including one in October convicting Colombian businessman and drug kingpin Joaquin Mario Valencia-Trujillo, have been tried in Tampa.

It caught world headlines when reports from Costa Rica in Central America said that a strange homemade submarine transporting three tons of cocaine was caught by authorities with a Sri Lankan national, two Colombians and a Guatemalan last month..

The unique 50 foot long underwater transporting vessel is made of wood and fiber glass and the men traveling inside were breathing through pipes jutting out of water the authorities said.

Before this, the Sri Lankan insurgent group was building a similar home made submarine in Phukayet, Thailand but was caught when it was under construction.

Fernando Berrocal, the Security minister of Costa Rica said seizing of the strange craft was possible since the submarine could be identified by the three breathing pipes which were mysteriously skimming the ocean surface. Since the men were arrested in the international waters they were taken to the United States for prosecution.

The strange craft sailed seven miles per hour just six feet beneath the water, the Costa Rican Security minister told the country's newspapers. This is not the first time the Sri Lankans are mentioned with the Cocaine smuggling of Colombia. Years ago a Colombian newspaper in Bogota mentioned there was a failed attempt on the part of the Sri Lankan terrorists, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to supply guns to some Colombians and train them in warfare in exchange for cocaine. But the newspaper said at that time the program did not go through and failed. It could not go beyond negotiations the newspaper revealed.

The submarine was spotted November 17, about one hundred miles off the coast near Cabo Blanco National Park on the Nicoya peninsula of Costa Rica, the reports said. "This is the first time in the country's history that a craft with these characteristics has been caught near the national coasts," the country's Minister of Security further said in a statement.

U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration agents, FBI and Colombian officials aided Costa Rican authorities in the operation, Berrocal, the minister of security said.

According to the same sources the arresting officials took the submarine to a Costa Rican Coast Guard station and were trying to determine its origins. It was found with several tanks of petrol, but it has been found the vessel, which had a bailer to keep out water, probably did not travel far. One aim of the investigation would be to determine whether the drug smuggling is anyway connected to terrorism.

According to Colombian police sources smuggling cocaine by sea has become the top method of transport in recent years, as radar systems have made it difficult to smuggle drugs in small airplanes as was done in the past.