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Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI)

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Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI)

Most people think customs officers only check bags at the airport. India’s customs-intelligence agency does much more. It busts drug labs, tracks gold from Dubai to Mumbai, and untangles trade routes built to hide where goods really come from.



Container handling at Jawaharlal Nehru Port, Nhava Sheva. DRI has intercepted smuggled gold, cigarettes and e-cigarettes here. Photo by Ccmarathe, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

DRI India’s premier anti-smuggling intelligence agency.
Born 1957 Constituted on 4 December 1957. Roots in CRIB, 1953.
12 zones Each headed by an Additional Director General.
Parent CBIC, under the Ministry of Finance.

CBIC: Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs.

Customs Act, 1962: DRI's main law. Officers are notified as Customs Officers.

NDPS Act, 1985: DRI officers are also authorised under it.

SAFTA: South Asian Free Trade Area. Duty-free entry if Rules of Origin are met.

1 Chapter 1: What DRI Is

Must Know

Who it is

- The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) is India's premier anti-smuggling intelligence agency.
- It functions under the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC), Ministry of Finance.
- It is one of several bodies covered in India's Security and Intelligence Agencies.

Remember: DRI = customs intelligence. It sits in CBIC, not in the Home Ministry.

Origin

- DRI was constituted on 4 December 1957.
- Its roots go back to the Central Revenue Intelligence Board (CRIB), set up in 1953.
- The 1957 mandate also included training intelligence and investigation officers at Custom Houses and Central Excise Collectorates.

The laws it enforces

- DRI enforces the Customs Act, 1962, along with over fifty other allied laws.
- These include the NDPS Act, 1985, the Arms Act, 1959, and the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
- DRI officers are notified as Customs Officers under the Customs Act.
- They are also authorised officers under the NDPS Act. See The NDPS Act, 1985.

What it chases

- Its core mandate is to detect and curb smuggling of prohibited goods.
- These include narcotics, gold, diamonds, counterfeit currency, wildlife products and hazardous substances.
- It also targets antiquities and wildlife trafficking linked to the Wildlife Protection Act and CITES.

> **Quick check 1.** DRI works under the Central Board of Direct Taxes. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

2 Chapter 2: How DRI Is Organised

Good to Know

- DRI runs through 12 zonal units.
- Each is headed by an Additional Director General.
- These are divided into regional and sub-regional units.
- The units sit at major ports, airports, land border points and metropolitan cities.

- Many busts happen at borders. See Land Border Management in India: Beyond the Fence and the Force.

3 Chapter 3: What DRI Seized in 2026

Current Affairs

Gold: airports, rail and border

- **26 Jun:** DRI broke a gold syndicate at Mumbai Airport. About 15 kg of foreign-origin gold worth ₹23 crore was seized and 15 people were arrested. A gold-melting facility was busted in Mumbai and 9 people were arrested across the chain. In Bengaluru, 1.8 kg of gold paste was found in a passenger's clothing, plus jewellery, silver and cash at his home. Follow-up raids in six more cities recovered more gold. A Surat raid seized 2 kg of cocaine. (Source: Akashvani/AIR, Ministry of Finance)

- **1 Jul:** DRI dismantled a gold syndicate on the Indo-Bangladesh border in West Bengal. Seven people on motorcycles were caught in Nadia district. They carried 180 defaced, foreign-marked gold bars in tailored cloth belts. The gold weighed about 24 kg and was worth about ₹34 crore. All seven were arrested under the Customs Act. The gold was meant to be passed to another set of carriers. (Source: Akashvani/AIR)
- **18 Jul:** In a separate precious-metals drive, DRI seized 15 kg of gold, 20 kg of silver and ₹2.20 crore in cash. Thirteen people were arrested. At IGI Airport, a passenger hid 1 kg of gold in his luggage's metal frame. At Mumbai Airport, gold dust worth ₹7.50 crore was found in the undergarments of three foreign nationals. In West Bengal, two vehicles carried 32 gold biscuits worth ₹6 crore in fabricated cavities. (Source: PIB)
- **25 Jul:** DRI's Mumbai Zonal Unit broke two syndicates at Mumbai airport. It seized 15.764 kg of 24-carat gold worth ₹23.63 crore and arrested 8 people. "Operation Sky Vault" found 12.004 kg of gold bars hidden in an aircraft from Addis Ababa, for later pick-up. "Operation Midas Mop" caught cleaning staff carrying 3.76 kg of gold dust in wax form from a Dubai flight. (Source: IANS via The Shillong Times)
- **1 Aug:** A week of pan-India operations led to 20 arrests, including 5 foreign nationals. Gold worth ₹14 crore was seized, including from a false-bottomed trolley at IGI Airport. At Chennai, 142 Red Sanders logs worth ₹2.5 crore hid behind plastic crates. In Manipur, about 2.7 kg of heroin sat inside soap cases. At Nhava Sheva, 9,230 banned e-cigarettes were mis-declared as LED fixtures. (Source: PIB)
- **10 Sep:** Six pan-India operations netted about 41 kg of foreign-origin gold worth about ₹62 crore. Twenty-four people were arrested, three of them foreign nationals. Smuggling ran through airports, rail and

the Indo-Bangladesh border. One Delhi bust uncovered a gold-melting and die-cutting unit that recovered 10.2 kg. (Source: PIB)

Drugs and arms

- **1 Aug:** DRI busted a hidden Alprazolam and Diazepam lab in Satara, Maharashtra. It seized about 1 kg of finished Alprazolam, over 15 kg in intermediate form and about 3.75 kg of Diazepam. It also took roughly 400 litres of raw materials. A fast follow-up in Pune arrested the intended buyer. Both drugs are NDPS-regulated benzodiazepines. They have medical uses but high abuse potential.
- **5–6 Aug:** A joint operation across Assam and Mizoram traced methamphetamine, poppy seeds and areca nuts to the Indo-Myanmar border. An ambulance near Aizawl carried 15 kg of methamphetamine tablets worth over ₹45 crore, hidden beside a dummy patient on a stretcher. About 11 MT of poppy seeds worth ₹1.67 crore were found at Karimganj, Assam, in bags marked as tea. Ten MT of areca nuts were seized from a train at Rangia. (Source: Observer Voice)
- **18 Jul:** In a nationwide crackdown on drugs, cigarettes and arms, five people were arrested. In Mizoram, 15 kg of methamphetamine tablets from Myanmar were seized. At Nhava Sheva, nearly 85 lakh smuggled Gold Flake cigarettes worth ₹20 crore were declared as “Plastic Storage Boxes”. In Amritsar, drone-dropped parcels held Pakistan-made pistols. In Chennai, about 4 kg of pseudoephedrine, a methamphetamine precursor, was seized. (Source: PIB)

Wildlife

- **7–10 Jul:** Pan-India raids seized over 440 endangered or protected animals and about 15 kg of ivory. Thirty-three people were arrested. The raids spanned Rajasthan, Karnataka, Maharashtra and West Bengal. A joint DRI–CBI operation recovered Schedule I species

such as Slow Lorises, Binturongs, Star Tortoises and Egyptian Vultures. Airport catches from Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur and Colombo flights included exotic turtles, lizards, primates, pangolin scales, a leopard pelt and Red Sanders. (Source: PIB)

- **9 Sep:** Six wildlife operations in 10 days. DRI seized two leopard pelts, 180 live Indian Star Tortoises, 12 live Tokay geckos, about 24 kg of pangolin scales and 500 g of tiger bones. Thirteen people were arrested. (Source: PIB)

Remember: Wildlife cases fall under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. Ivory trade is also barred in line with CITES.

> **Quick check 2.** Wildlife cases fall under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

4 Chapter 4: Origin Fraud and the Pakistan Ban

Good to Know

The ₹2,500 crore areca nut fraud

- **16 Aug:** DRI broke a syndicate that mis-declared South-East Asian areca nuts as Bangladeshi. (Source: PIB)
- Areca nut imports normally face a 100% Basic Customs Duty.
- Genuine Bangladeshi imports are duty-exempt under SAFTA if they meet Rules of Origin.
- The syndicate bought nuts from Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia. It routed them through a Bangladeshi export zone to swap containers. Then it got fake SAFTA Certificates of Origin.

- DRI searched premises in Kolkata and Visakhapatnam. It seized about ₹75 lakh in cash and 160 MT of areca nuts.
- The month-long probe found over ₹2,500 crore of evaded duty. Nine people were arrested. One Customs Broker's licence was suspended.

Banned Pakistan-origin dates

- **5 Aug:** DRI seized 364 MT of banned Pakistan-origin dry dates worth about ₹3 crore at Kandla Port. Importers had mis-declared them as UAE-origin, routed through Dubai. (Source: Akashvani/AIR)
- The ban stems from DGFT Notification No. 06/2025-26, dated 2 May 2025.
- It prohibits direct or indirect import or transit of all goods originating in or exported from Pakistan, under the Foreign Trade Policy 2023.
- The release also cited an earlier case. About 14 MT of Guggul resin, falsely declared as Somalia-origin, was seized at Tuticorin but was really Pakistan-origin. Two people were arrested.
- Guggul is CITES Appendix II-listed and IUCN Critically Endangered.
- So DRI is a key enforcer of India's trade-prohibition policy toward Pakistan. See India–Pakistan and India–China Relations.
- Many of its cases are about a false country of origin, not just hidden contraband.

> **Quick check 3.** Areca nuts from Indonesia were passed off as Bangladeshi to claim duty-free entry under SAFTA. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

5 Chapter 5: DRI and Its Sibling Bodies

Great to Know

- CBIC and CBDT were created together on 1 January 1964, when the Central Board of Revenue split into two.
- CBIC handles customs and indirect taxes. CBDT handles income tax. See Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT).
- DRI shares the Department of Revenue with the Enforcement Directorate.
- DRI handles smuggling and customs fraud. ED handles money laundering. See Enforcement Directorate: Following the Money Trail.
- Smuggling crosses state lines. So DRI works with Customs field offices, the Narcotics Control Bureau and state police.
- DRI is one part of a wider anti-smuggling and counter-narcotics architecture.

> **Think it through: why do both DRI and ED sit under the Department of Revenue?**
>
> Both chase money crimes. DRI follows goods and duty evasion. ED follows laundered money. Same ministry, different jobs.

> **Quick check 4.** DRI deals only with money laundering cases. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Quick Q&A

- **DRI born?** 4 December 1957.
- **DRI parent body?** CBIC.
- **Main law?** Customs Act, 1962.

- **Zonal units?** 12.
- **CBIC and CBDT created?** 1 January 1964.

Practice MCQs

1. When was the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) constituted?

A. 1953

B. 4 December 1957

C. 1962

D. 1985

See answer ↓

2. Under which body does DRI function?

A. Ministry of Home Affairs

B. Ministry of External Affairs

C. NITI Aayog

D. Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC), Ministry of Finance

See answer ↓

3. DRI officers are notified as Customs Officers under the Customs Act, 1962. Under which other law are they authorised officers?

A. Arms Act, 1959

B. Wildlife Protection Act, 1972

C. Foreign Trade Policy 2023

D. NDPS Act, 1985

See answer ↓

4. In the 18 July 2026 DRI operations, 15 kg of Methamphetamine tablets were intercepted on the Aizawl-Champhai Road, smuggled in from which country?

A. Bhutan

B. Bangladesh

C. Myanmar

D. Nepal

See answer ↓

5. At Nhava Sheva, Mumbai, DRI seized nearly 85 lakh smuggled cigarettes from a container falsely declared to contain what?

A. Auto spare parts

B. Textile rolls

C. Plastic Storage Boxes

D. Ceramic tiles

See answer ↓

6. Which trade agreement did a smuggling syndicate abuse to avoid customs duty on areca nut imports, DRI revealed on 16 August 2026?

A. India-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement

B. Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)

C. South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA)

D. SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA)

See answer ↓

7. In DRI's SAFTA areca-nut fraud case announced 16 August 2026, what was the approximate revenue loss uncovered, and how many people were arrested?

A. ₹750 crore; five arrested

B. ₹1,200 crore; thirteen arrested

C. ₹3,600 crore; twenty arrested

D. ₹2,500 crore; nine arrested

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **B.** DRI was constituted on 4 December 1957, with roots tracing back to the Central Revenue Intelligence Board (CRIB), set up in 1953. ↑ Q1
2. **D.** DRI functions under the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC), Ministry of Finance. ↑ Q2
3. **D.** DRI officers are also notified as authorised officers under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985. ↑ Q3
4. **C.** The drugs were smuggled from Myanmar via the Zokhawthar sector of Mizoram. ↑ Q4
5. **C.** The container, arriving from Dubai, was declared to contain "Plastic Storage Boxes" but held nearly 85 lakh smuggled Gold Flake cigarettes, valued at Rs 20 crore. ↑ Q5
6. **C.** The correct answer is the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA). DRI found a syndicate mis-declaring South-East Asian areca nuts as Bangladeshi-origin, to wrongly claim SAFTA's duty-free entry for goods from Bangladesh. ↑ Q6
7. **D.** The correct answer is ₹2,500 crore in evaded customs duty, with nine people arrested. DRI's month-long investigation traced this loss to fraudulent SAFTA claims on South-East Asian areca nuts routed through Bangladesh. ↑ Q7

Quick-check answers

1. **False.** ↑ 1
2. **True.** ↑ 2
3. **True.** ↑ 3
4. **False.** ↑ 4

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