

Task Team To Investigate Airport Drug Smuggling

Written by Rudi Prinsloo
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A special task team was formed on Tuesday to tackle drug trafficking through South African airports.

This follows the second arrest in a month of an SAA crew in London on drug charges.

A joint statement from SAA, police and the Airports Company of SA said the team will review the additional interventions implemented by SAA since the first incident in January 2009, and manage the urgent implementation of additional security measures.

The team will also identify potential risk areas involving the trafficking of contraband across airport operations.

Fifteen crew members -- six women and nine men -- were arrested at London's Heathrow airport on Monday after 2kg of cocaine was allegedly found in their luggage.

They were released on bail on Monday night after questioning and will be expected to return to the UK for further action on April 7 and 8.

"The group, who operated flight SA234 from Johannesburg to London yesterday morning, were detained by authorities in London on Monday after contraband was found in an item of hand luggage on the crew bus at Heathrow Airport," the statement read.

Arrangements for their return to South Africa are currently being made.

"The airline is co-operating fully with British authorities in an investigation which is currently underway. An investigation in Johannesburg, involving SAA Aviation Security and the SAPS Crime Intelligence Unit, is also under way."

After the January incident -- which led to the arrest of a security official and a cabin attendant after dagga and cocaine was allegedly found in luggage -- additional security measures were introduced.

This included sniffer dogs.

The airline said it would continue monitoring the situation.

Police spokeswoman Senior Superintendent Tummi Golding earlier said there was clearly a breach at a key national security point and this needed to be investigated.

She added that drug smugglers were "always testing new ways" of moving their products.

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