

## Police nab burglar ring targeting Washington desis for gold

Law has finally caught up with a ring of picky burglars who had been targeting South Asian families in a Washington DC neighbourhood for their gold.

Indian American residents of Fairfax, a suburb of the national capital in neighbouring Virginia, expressed relief as the police arrested two men and a woman from the New York City area in Centreville. Police suspect the burglars hit 26 homes in Fairfax and three more in Loudoun County since January. Each time, the burglars struck they ignored silver, gems and electronics, taking only gold jewellery, saris with gold threads and gold statues.

Police said they believe gold was being stolen because it is selling at more than \$1,000 an ounce. But they don't know how or why certain houses, mostly in the Fair Oaks, Reston and Centreville areas of western Fairfax, were targeted.

Three suspects, Francisco Gray, 39, of Nassau County, New York; Dagoberto Soto-Ramirez, 27, and his wife, Melinda Soto, 33, both of Queens, New York have been charged with nine counts of felony. They are being held without bond in the Fairfax jail.

The burglaries generated intense concern in the South Asian community, and three town hall-style meetings were held, first with elected officials and then, last month, with Fairfax Police Chief David M. Rohrer. Residents were pleased by the arrests.

'The community is excited,' said Raman Kumar, an IT professional, one of the early victims whose home in Centreville was burgled way back on Feb 27.

'They are also thankful for the awareness the media put on this,' because neighbours who learned of the burglaries might have provided information that led to the arrests, Kumar, who had mobilised the Indian-American community over the issue, told IANS.

The arrests came after US marshals working with the police burglary task force spotted a sport utility vehicle with two men and a woman inside who fitted the description of suspects in the burglaries Tuesday.

After a search of the sport utility vehicle, investigators found a lap top computer, a GPS unit, and a police scanner tuned to Fairfax County police radio channels.

A police spokesperson declined to say how investigators linked the suspects to the four Fair Oaks burglaries. She said police hoped the search of seized items such as the laptop computer would lead them to more property or more suspects.

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