

Ex-Shin Bet official among four arrested in 'wide-ranging' operation that police believe utilized company planes to transport drugs to Israel

By TOI staff

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A high-ranking security liaison for El Al and a former Shin Bet official were arrested Monday on suspicion of smuggling large amounts of cocaine into Israel on El Al planes.

Police arrested four people in total for their suspected roles in the international drug-smuggling network, which a police attorney dubbed "a wide-ranging affair."

The details of the case were revealed Monday after a Rishon LeZion Magistrate's Court judge rejected, during a remand hearing, a police request to gag the details of their investigation. All four suspects were ordered to remain in custody.

The main suspect was identified as Rami Yogev, a high-ranking El Al employee who oversees coordination between the airline and the Shin Bet security service, and is also in charge of the airline's security abroad.

Police believe Yogev used his top security clearance and access to El Al planes to facilitate the

drug shipments.

The ex-Shin Bet official was identified as Beno Shalom, who previously served as head of security for the Prime Minister's Office.

The police did not indicate the extent of Shalom's role in the smuggling operation.

Yogev, Shalom and the two others were arrested Monday after drugs were discovered in the hand luggage of one of the suspects, who had just arrived on a flight from **JOHANNESBURG**.

"This is a large and wide-ranging affair," police attorney Nadav Rappoport told Judge Guy Avnon during Monday's hearing. "The suspects smuggled large quantities of drugs into Israel using complex methods."

Rappoport said the investigation was in its early stages, and noted to Avnon that the police suspicions against Yogev were "more severe" than against the rest of the suspects.

Avnon ordered Yogev, Shalom and the third suspect to be remanded for nine days. The fourth was ordered to be held for three days.

In his decision, Avnon said there was "reasonable suspicion that links [Yogev] to the offenses" — given his role and high rank — and rejected the police request to keep the details under gag order.

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