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Smuggler Escapes Bengaluru Airport After Abandoning Bag with 29 Star Tortoises

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In a suspected case of wildlife trafficking, a man fled from Kempegowda International Airport in Bengaluru after abandoning a bag containing 29 Indian star tortoises during security screening. The incident occurred on Tuesday night and has prompted an investigation by customs and wildlife authorities.

According to officials, during routine X-ray screening of checked-in baggage, airport staff noticed unusual movement inside a bag. When customs officers opened it, they found 29 live Indian star tortoises, a protected species under India's Wildlife Protection Act and listed in Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), which prohibits their international trade.

When confronted, the passenger allegedly created a diversion and escaped from the terminal before he could be detained. Authorities have not yet confirmed the identity of the individual. A case has been registered, and efforts are underway to trace the suspect.

This is the latest in a series of wildlife smuggling attempts using airports as transit points. The Indian star tortoise, native to parts of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, is not found in the wild in Karnataka. Bengaluru, however, has become a known stopover in the illegal trafficking network, with smugglers often targeting destinations in Southeast Asia where demand for exotic pets remains high.

Just last month, officials at the same airport intercepted a passenger smuggling 234 star tortoises. In a separate case at Chennai airport, 437 tortoises were recovered from a passenger returning from Bangkok. In most cases, the tortoises are sedated and packed tightly in luggage to avoid detection.

The tortoises recovered on Tuesday have been handed over to the forest department and shifted to Bannerghatta Biological Park for care and observation. Officials stated the animals were in stable condition and would be released into their natural habitat following veterinary clearance.

Wildlife authorities believe the smuggler in this case may be linked to a larger trafficking network. The Wildlife Crime Control Bureau is coordinating with customs and forest officials to track down the person involved and dismantle any associated syndicates.