

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Two Arrested for Smuggling \$287,000 into St. Thomas Following High-Speed Chase and Apprehension Near Savana Island

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CBP Air and Marine Operations

ST. THOMAS -- United States Attorney Gretchen C.F. Shappert announced today that charges have been filed against two men for attempting to smuggle approximately \$287,000 into St. Thomas by boat. Arioc Diaz Melendez and Juan Carlos Diaz Melendez were arrested at 2:00 a.m. Monday morning and made their initial appearances in federal court on Monday afternoon in St. Thomas.

According to court documents, early Monday morning CBP Marine Unit agents identified a boat traveling without navigational lights north of Savana Island. CBP agents pulled their vessel alongside the 24-foot yola-type vessel that was operating without lights. CBP agents activated their police blue lights and discharged a flare, in an effort to convince the other vessel to yield. When CBP agents attempted to initiate a stop, the other vessel did not yield but instead increased speed.

The CBP agents shot one round into one of the engines of the other vessel at which point the vessel decreased speed and stopped. The passenger threw a duffel bag overboard. The bag was recovered by CBP agents and later found to contain roughly \$287,000 in U.S. currency. After CBP agents disabled one of the boat's motor, they boarded the vessel, and apprehended the two defendants. The agents also recovered a Glock firearm.

This case is being investigated by the Department of Homeland Security Investigations. It is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Juan Albino.

United States Attorney Shappert reminded the public that a complaint is merely a formal charging document, and it is not evidence of guilt. Every defendant is presumed innocent until and unless found guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.