



Department of Justice

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TWO U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT EMPLOYEES AND SEVEN OTHERS CHARGED IN SCHEME TO SELL VISAS

WASHINGTON, D.C.- Assistant Attorney General Michael Chertoff of the Criminal Division and McGregor W. Scott, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of California announced today that a federal grand jury in Sacramento returned an 18-count indictment charging nine persons, including two former State Department employees, in connection with an alleged corrupt scheme, operating out of the U.S. Embassy in Sri Lanka, to sell entry visas to the United States.

The indictment followed the arrests of eight of the nine defendants and searches at five locations in three states. According to a 130-page complaint unsealed in Sacramento yesterday, the scheme allegedly involved the payment of hundreds of thousands of dollars by persons in Sacramento and elsewhere to two married State Department employees between 2000 and 2003, in exchange for the issuance of visas to various foreign nationals, primarily from Vietnam and India.

The complaint further alleges that Acey R. Johnson, while working in the consular affairs section of the U.S. Embassy in Sri Lanka, issued visas to scores of persons pursuant to the scheme.

The indictment charges all nine defendants with conspiring to defraud the United States and to bribe public officials and to commit visa fraud. The charged defendants are: Long N. Lee, 51, a State Department Foreign Service Officer and career State Department employee; Acey R. Johnson, 32, who is married to Long N. Lee and was until recently a Consular Associate employed in the consular section of the U.S. Embassy in Sri Lanka; Vinesh Prasad, 33, of Sacramento; his brother Minesh Prasad, 28, of Sacramento; Narinderjit Singh Bhullar, 40, of Sacramento; his brother Davinder Singh Bhullar, 44, of India; Phuong-Hien Lam Trinh, 35, of Torrance, California; Rajwant S. Virk, 46, of Herndon, Virginia; and Rachhpal Singh, 32, of Hayward, California. The indictment also

charges some of the defendants with additional charges. The status of the defendants is as follows:

Acey R. Johnson, 32, who was until recently a Consular Associate employed in the consular section of the U.S. Embassy in Sri Lanka, was arrested on the morning of Tuesday, April 29, 2003, at his home in Port Orford, Oregon by Special Agents with the Diplomatic Security Service of the U.S. State Department ("DSS") and the FBI. He appeared in U.S. District Court yesterday in Medford, Oregon, and was ordered detained pending further proceedings in Medford on Monday, May 5, 2003 at 1:30 p.m.

Long N. Lee, 51, a State Department Foreign Service Officer and career State Department employee, who is married to defendant Johnson, was arrested at Dulles International Airport yesterday evening after being escorted from the U.S. Embassy in Colombo, Sri Lanka to the United States by DSS agents. She is scheduled to appear today at 2:00 p.m. before a U.S. Magistrate Judge in Alexandria, Virginia. Long had been the chief administrative officer at the Embassy.

Vinesh Prasad, 33, and Minesh Prasad, 28, of Sacramento, were arrested Tuesday morning, April 29, 2003, at their home in Sacramento. They appeared yesterday before a Magistrate Judge in Sacramento, and were ordered detained pending further proceedings on Wednesday, May 7, 2003, at 2:00 p.m.

Narinderjit Singh Bhullar, 40, of Sacramento, was arrested Tuesday morning at his home in Sacramento. He appeared before a Magistrate Judge that same day, and was scheduled to appear again for further proceedings today at 2:00 p.m. in Sacramento.

Phuong-Hien Lam Trinh, 35, of Torrance, California, was arrested Tuesday morning at her home in Torrance. She appeared yesterday before a Magistrate Judge in Los Angeles, who ordered her released upon the posting of bail in the amount of \$100,000 secured by real property. She was ordered to appear in Sacramento on Friday, May 9, 2003, at 2:00 p.m.

Rajwant S. Virk, 46, of Herndon, Virginia, was arrested Tuesday morning at his home in Herndon. He appeared that same day before a Magistrate Judge in Alexandria, Virginia. He was released on bond and is expected to appear there again today at 2:00 p.m. for further proceedings.

Rachhpal Singh, 32, of Hayward, California, was arrested Tuesday morning at his home Hayward. He appeared yesterday before a Magistrate Judge in San Francisco, where he was released on bond and ordered to appear in U.S. District Court in Sacramento on Tuesday, May 6, 2003, at 2:00 p.m.

Davinder Singh Bhullar, 44, remains at large and is believed to be in India. He is currently a fugitive in an unrelated criminal case also pending in U.S. District Court in Sacramento.

In addition to the conspiracy charged against all defendants, defendants Johnson, Lee and Vinesh and Minesh Prasad are each charged with ten counts of wire fraud, one count of mail fraud, and one count of bribery. Defendants Vinesh and Minesh Prasad, Narinderjit Singh Bhullar and his brother Davinder Singh Bhullar are charged with one count of visa fraud, and Narinderjit and Davinder Singh Bhullar are each charged with one count of wire fraud. Vinesh Prasad is further charged with one count of encouraging illegal entry of aliens for financial gain, and with two counts of money laundering. Finally, Narinderjit Singh Bhullar is charged with one count of money laundering.

Each of the charges in the indictment is a felony. The maximum sentence for the conspiracy charge, and for each wire fraud, mail fraud, and money laundering charge is five years in prison. The visa fraud and encouraging entry by aliens charges each has a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison, and the bribery charge has a maximum penalty of 15 years in prison. Each count in the indictment also carries a penalty of up to a three-year period of supervised release, and a \$250,000 fine. The indictment also seeks forfeiture of various properties, bank accounts, and over \$175,000 in cash seized during searches on Tuesday.

The case is being prosecuted in U.S. District Court in Sacramento by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Benjamin B. Wagner and S. Robert Tice-Raskin of the U.S. Attorney's Office, and Noah D. Bookbinder of the Public Integrity Section, headed by Noel L. Hillman, Chief. The case is the product of an extensive investigation conducted by the Diplomatic Security Service and the Joint Terrorism Task Force for the Eastern District of California, a task force headquartered at the FBI offices in Sacramento. Sri Lankan law enforcement authorities also provided assistance in the investigation. The U.S. Attorney thanked the U.S. Ambassador in Sri Lanka, E. Ashley Wills, for his assistance.

The United States Attorney's Office noted that the complaint and indictment are only accusations, and that the defendants are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.

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