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## News Releases



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### 3 Sacramento attorneys receive lengthy sentences in asylum fraud scheme investigated by ICE HSI

SACRAMENTO, Calif. - Three attorneys for a northern California law firm and their contract interpreter were sentenced to lengthy prison terms Friday following their conviction on charges stemming from an investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Office of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) that revealed they orchestrated a scheme to file hundreds of false asylum claims.

Jagprit Singh Sekhon, 39, of Westminster, Calif., formerly of Sacramento, was sentenced to 108 months in prison. His brother and former partner in the Sekhon & Sekhon law firm, Jagdip Singh Sekhon, 42, of Salida, Calif., was sentenced to 60 months in prison. Their former law firm associate, Manjit Kaur Rai, 33, of Discovery Bay, Calif., was sentenced to 30 months in prison. The sentencing hearing for interpreter Iosif Caza, 43, of Sacramento has not yet concluded. Interpreter Luciana Harmath, 29, of Glendale, Ariz., formerly of Sacramento, was sentenced to four months in prison last month.

Judge Damrell ordered Jagdip Sekhon and Jagprit Sekhon immediately remanded into custody to begin serving their sentences. Rai was given three weeks to surrender to the designated prison.

The defendants were convicted last year of orchestrating a long-running scheme to file hundreds of false asylum claims. In sentencing Jagdip Sekhon, Judge Damrell said that while there were flaws in the asylum system that "doesn't give license to lawyers to take advantage of it." One of the primary purposes of the sentences, the judge said was "to deter future criminal conduct by lawyers who take advantage of this flawed system."

"As these sentences make clear, immigration benefit fraud is a serious crime," said Daniel Lane, assistant special agent in charge of ICE HSI in Sacramento. "Benefit fraud schemes like this not only undermine our nation's legal immigration system, they also pose a potential security threat. Homeland Security Investigations will move aggressively to identify and investigate individuals who exploit and corrupt our immigration system solely to enrich themselves."

"Through the granting of asylum, this nation offers its protection to victims of ethnic, religious, and political persecution from across the world," said U.S. Attorney Benjamin B. Wagner. "These defendants made a living out of cynically abusing and subverting the asylum process. That three of these defendants were licensed attorneys, officers of the court who are supposed to uphold the integrity of the process, is particularly offensive."

In addition to the prison sentences, the two Sekhons were also ordered to pay financial penalties. Jagprit Sekhon entered into stipulated money forfeiture judgments totaling \$170,000. Following an extensive forfeiture trial, Judge Damrell ordered Jagdip Sekhon to forfeit \$690,590 in ill-gotten gains. Beyond that, last year the California State Bar entered interim suspensions against the Sekhon brothers and Rai. In June, Jagdip Sekhon resolved his State Bar charges and agreed to a two-year suspension, which was stayed with an actual nine-month suspension from the practice of law. As part of his actual suspension, Jagdip Sekhon will be required to meet certain conditions before he may resume the practice of law.

The Sekhon brothers were partners in the law firm of Sekhon & Sekhon, which had offices in Sacramento and San Francisco and specialized in immigration cases.

According to evidence presented at the trial, beginning in the late 1990s and continuing through 2004, the defendants filed hundreds of asylum applications, primarily on behalf of Indian and Romanian nationals. In order to qualify for asylum in the United States, an applicant must demonstrate a well-founded fear of persecution in his or her home country. Evidence at the trial showed the defendants filed numerous asylum applications containing fictitious stories of persecution, including false accounts of arbitrary arrest, detention, torture, and rape. Some of the accounts were reused in multiple asylum claims.

The applications were often supported by counterfeit or fraudulent doctor's letters, medical certificates and affidavits. The testimony also showed that many of Sekhon & Sekhon's Romanian clients traveled to Sacramento from other states, such as Washington, Arizona, Illinois and Michigan.

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and ICE HSI are currently reviewing hundreds of the asylum cases filed by Sekhon & Sekhon to determine if they will be reopened.

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