



News Releases

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Santa Ana, CA

Owners of L.A.-area immigration consulting business arrested for visa fraud

Firm allegedly charged up to \$60,000 to file bogus marriage, work visa petitions

SANTA ANA, Calif. - Three members of an Orange County family who operate an immigration consulting business that caters primarily to Indian nationals were arrested Wednesday morning on immigration fraud charges for allegedly filing bogus marriage and work visa petitions on behalf of aliens who paid fees as high as \$60,000.

Ajit Kumar Bhargava, 61; his wife, Nisha Bhargava, 56; and their daughter, Runjhun Bhargava, 30, were arrested this morning after being named in a criminal complaint filed March 29 in U.S. District Court.

The three defendants, all residents of Yorba Linda, Calif., own and operate MPEagle Consultants in Cerritos, Calif., where special agents with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) executed a search warrant Wednesday. All three are charged with conspiracy to commit visa fraud.

According to court documents, the three members of the Bhargava family recruited unemployed and low-income United States citizens with promises of \$2,000 payments in exchange for "marrying" MPEagle's alien clients. To make the bogus marriages appear legitimate, the defendants had the "couples" pose together for photos and open joint bank accounts. Based on the sham marriages, MPEagle sought permanent residency for the aliens by filing fraudulent immigrant visa petitions with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). The affidavit in support of the criminal complaint describes how Ajit Bhargava quoted different fees to MPEagle clients depending on the type of visa desired - \$15,000 for a work visa, or up to \$60,000 for a visa based upon marriage to a U.S. citizen.

"America's immigration system is not for sale and those who think they can game the system for personal gain will find there's a high price to pay," said Claude Arnold, special agent in charge for ICE HSI in Los Angeles. "Visa fraud is a serious crime. Not only does it undermine the integrity of our legal immigration process and penalize those who abide by the law, it also poses a significant security vulnerability."

The investigation in this case began in September 2009 after officers with the Fraud Detection and National Security Division at the USCIS Field Office in Santa Ana noted suspicious similarities involving 21 visa petitions that were ultimately traced back to MPEagle. In some instances, the applicants used the same marriage certificates, divorce certificates, marriage witnesses or even United States citizen "spouses."

"Our fraud detection officers work collaboratively with ICE HSI to investigate fraudulent conduct that jeopardizes the integrity of our immigration system," said Jane Arellano, District Director for USCIS in Los Angeles. "We are very proud of the work that they do."

A criminal complaint contains allegations that a defendant has committed a crime. Every defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.

The three defendants arrested Wednesday morning are expected to make their initial appearance in federal court Wednesday afternoon. The charge of conspiracy to commit visa fraud carries a maximum penalty of up to five years in prison.

On its website, MPEagle says it offers immigration services related to employment, business and investment needs. In addition to the Cerritos office searched this morning, the website lists contact information for business locations in Georgia, New Jersey and India.