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***News Release***

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**Fraudsters get 31 years of jail for £13m**

**tax and immigration scam**

Five fraudsters who falsely claimed £13 million in tax repayments, and facilitated around 900 bogus visa applications, have been sentenced to a total of more than 31 years in jail.

London law student Abul Kalam Muhammad (known as AKM) Rezaul Karim, 42, was the ringleader in the organised crime group. He and his four accomplices set up 79 bogus companies and created fake documentation which were used by Bangladeshi nationals in fraudulent visa applications.

They also used these companies to attempt to fraudulently reclaim £13 million in tax repayments from HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) over a six-year period.

The immigration fraud was uncovered in 2011 when the Home Office identified a suspicious pattern in a series of points-based applications for Tier 1 general and entrepreneur visas.

Both routes had a significant financial requirement, with applicants earning points based either on previous earnings or by demonstrating they had access to a minimum of £50,000 to invest in UK business. Case workers noticed that several applications were being submitted using slight variations on the same company names.

An investigation by Immigration Enforcement’s Criminal and Financial Investigation (CFI) team was launched and HMRC called in to probe the validity of the companies and PAYE claims linked to them.

The gang claimed their clients were employees as part of their tax and immigration fraud. They created fake payslips and provided false information on around 900 visa applications to ensure eligibility for a Tier 1 visa. At the time of the offences, Tier 1 (General) and Tier 1 (Entrepreneur) visas were both potential paths to obtaining settlement in the UK.

They transferred money into clients’ bank accounts to make them appear well-paid employees, with one client, a worker at a fast food restaurant, able to claim annual earnings of almost £60,000. The money was paid back to the advisor the following month and, between 2008 and 2013, millions were laundered through the bank accounts.

Officers found that Karim, his brother-in-law Enamul Karim, 34, Kazi Borkot Ullah, 39, accountant Jalpa Trivedi, 41 and Mohammed Tamij Uddin, 47, charged some clients on temporary visas wanting to remain in the UK a minimum of £700 in cash for their fraudulent immigration services.

Trivedi, an ACCA (Association of Chartered Certified Accountants) qualified accountant, enabled the fraud to happen by providing official letters certifying the amounts the visa applicants had supposedly invested in their businesses.

Karim and his accomplices were arrested on 26 February 2013. They were found guilty on 16 November 2018 after a trial that lasted 35 weeks at Southwark Crown Court. AKM Karim, Enamul Karim and Ullah, absconded in July 2018 during the trial.

Richard Las, Deputy Director, Fraud Investigation Service, HMRC, said:

“AKM Karim was the driving force in this fraud, having his organised crime group create false payslips to steal public money and deprive the UK of funding needed for its vital public services. The money evaded is the equivalent to the starting salary of 494 new nurses in London for a year.

“HMRC worked closely with the Home Office to gather the strong evidence that helped convict Karim and his accomplices in making these fictitious claims.

“Anyone with information about the whereabouts of AKM Karim, Enamul Karim and Ullah, or those suspected of committing this type of fraud should report it to HMRC online, or call our Fraud Hotline on 0800 788 887.”

Lyn Sari, Deputy Director, Immigration Enforcement’s Criminal and Financial Investigation, said:

“My officers, working alongside our partners at HMRC, have conducted a thorough and complex investigation to dismantle a serious organised crime group that was intent on undermining the UK’s immigration system.

“The length of the investigation – the longest ever undertaken by CFI - is in itself an indication of the sophisticated criminality that these offenders were engaged in. My officers have shown tremendous tenacity, as well as expertise, to bring this case to a successful conclusion.

“It sends a clear message that we will not hesitate to prosecute anyone involved in this type of criminality.”

Martin Lindop, Unit Head in the Specialist Fraud Division at the Crown Prosecution Service, said:

“This is the largest case of its type the CPS has prosecuted. Working together with a large team of officers from the Home Office and HMRC we were able to build a compelling case against the defendants.

“Due to the sheer scale of the case, the CPS made use of modern technology in presenting the evidence to the jury digitally via iPads.”

The defendants were sentenced at Southwark Crown Court on 23 November 2018. AKM Karim, Enamul Karim and Ullah, were sentenced in their absence and warrants have been issued for their arrests. AKM Karim got 10 years and six months, Enamul Karim nine years and four months and Ullah five years and ten months.

Trivedi was handed a three year jail sentence and Uddin two years and six months.

On sentencing, His Honour Judge Griffith, referring to the Karims, said: “They were the leaders of this fraud, involving others, doing significant planning and carrying it out over a long period of time.”

Confiscation proceedings to recover assets from those involved in the fraud will now begin.

**Notes for Editors**

1. The defendants’ personal details are:

* Abul Kalam Muhammad (known as AKM) Rezaul Karim,DOB 22/02/1976, an immigration advisor of Albert Basin Way, Victoria Docks, London. Jailed for ten years and six months and disqualified from being a director for ten years.
* Enamul Karim, DOB 01/07/1984, an immigration advisor of Halbutt Street, Dagenham. Jailed for nine years and four months and disqualified from being a director for seven years.
* Kazi Borkot Ullah, DOB 10/02/1979, an immigration advisor of Halbutt Street, Dagenham. Jailed for five years and ten months and disqualified from being a director for five years.
* Jalpa Trivedi, DOB 24/12/1976, an accountant of Cavan Road, Redbourn, St Albans, Hertfordshire. She provided fake official letters and accounts certifying the amounts of income clients had supposedly received while working for them. Jailed for three years.
* Mohammed Tamij Uddin, DOB 12/08/1971, an immigration advisor of Witan Street, Bethnal Green, London. Jailed for two years and six months.

1. AKM Karim, working with his brother-in-law Enamul Karim, set up a number of firms, including Immigration4U and Rukaiya & Associates Ltd. The companies helped people who were not British citizens to submit visa applications to remain in the UK. These applications were Tier 1 – people whose value could be demonstrated in financial terms (highly skilled workers, or businessmen/women).
2. The Tier 1 (General) route opened in 2008 to replace the former ‘Highly Skilled Migrant Programme’. It was intended to provide a route for those looking to find high skilled employment in the UK.  In order to obtain a Tier 1 general visa migrants had to score a minimum number of points against a number of attributes: age; qualifications, previous earnings, UK experience, English Language ability and the ability to support themselves without access to public funds.

The route was later closed to new applicants in 2011, to extension applications in April 2015 and to settlement applications in April 2018, for not operating as intended. The Home Office has worked with HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) to identify and tackle abuse of this route.

1. The Tier 1 (Entrepreneur) route is for migrants who wish to establish, join or take over one or more businesses in the UK. The Home Office has introduced a number of measures since 2012 to tighten the route against abuse, including inviting applicants to interview and suspending switching from study categories, the Tier 1 (General) category and the Tier 1 (Post-Study Work) category, except in certain circumstances.  Since September 2015, overseas applicants have been required to provide criminal record certificates for every country they have lived in during the 10 years before their application. The Home Office continues to review all immigration routes to ensure that they work in the national interest.
2. AKM Rezaul Karim, Enamul Karim, Kazi Borkot Ullah, Jalpa Hariom Trivedi and Md Tamij Uddin were found guilty of conspiracy to defraud the Secretary of State for the Home Office by making false Tier 1 applications between 31 December 2008 and 27 February 2013.
3. AKM Rezaul Karim, Enamul Karim and Kazi Borkot Ullah were re-arrested in 2017 for continuing the immigration fraud using different entities. They were also convicted of conspiring between the 1 March 2013 and 5 May 2017 to defraud the Secretary of State for the Home Office, by submitting false information to the Home Office in respect of applications for leave to remain in the United Kingdom.
4. AKM Rezaul Karim, Enamul Karim, Kazi Borkot Ullah and Jalpa Hariom Trivedi were found guilty of conspiracy to cheat the public revenue, contrary to common law, between 31 December 2008 and 27 February 2013.
5. Hundreds of repayment claims totalling more than £13 million were attempted with £172,000 being paid out. Had this fraud not been identified, HMRC estimates that the tax loss could have reached £13 million.
6. The starting salary for a new nurse in London on Band 5 of the NHS Agenda for Change Pay Rates is £27,627.60. <http://www.nhsemployers.org/your-workforce/pay-and-reward/agenda-for-change/pay-scales/including-hcas>
7. Anyone with information about people committing this type of fraud should report it to HMRC online at <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/hm-revenue-customs/contact/customs-excise-and-vat-fraud-reporting> or call our Fraud Hotline on 0800 788 887.
8. Follow HMRC Press Office on Twitter @HMRCpressoffice

**Issued by HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) Press Office and Home Office Press Office**

**Press enquiries relating to tax contact HMRC Press Office:**

Roger Kasper

Tel: 03000 525110 / 07388 955843

Email: [roger.kasper@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:roger.kasper@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk)

Or

Lucy Collins

Tel: 03000 525872 / 07900 394 601

Email: [lucy.collins@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:lucy.collins@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk)

Out of hours

Tel: 07860 359544

**Website** [www.gov.uk/hmrc](http://www.gov.uk/hmrc)

**Press enquiries relating to immigration contact Home Office Press Office:**

Toby Allanson

Tel: 01279 336956 / 07919 305600

Email: [toby.allanson@homeoffice.gov.uk](mailto:toby.allanson@homeoffice.gov.uk)

Or

Jackie Stewart

Tel: 0141 555 1231

Email: [jackie.stewart2@homeoffice.gov.uk.cjsm.net](mailto:jackie.stewart2@homeoffice.gov.uk.cjsm.net)