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Kuwaiti students connected to US visa fraud ring

Compiled by Al Watan Daily

CALIFORNIA: A 46-year-old US citizen in Laguna Niguel, California and six alleged clients have been charged with participating in a ring of illegal test-takers helping Middle Eastern - including Kuwaiti - nationals obtain US student visas. Agents arrested 16 of Eamonn Daniel Higgins suspected clients who remained in Southern California while he was being charged, and another 42 individuals also involved could be subject to deportation proceedings.

Higgins made an appearance in a US District Court in Santa Ana, California Monday on one count of conspiracy to commit visa fraud. A not guilty plea was entered on behalf of Higgins by a judge and he has been released on 5,000 US dollars bail.

Reportedly charging up to \$1,500 per student on English proficiency exams, writing assessments, English and math college placement tests, final exams and other college coursework that resulted in maintaining F-1 student visas, Higgins obtained thousands of dollars from foreign students from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, Turkey and Qatar.

In one case, a blond woman working for Higgins was allowed to take an exam using a fake ID that paired her photo with a man's Arabic name, said Debra Parker, acting deputy special agent in charge for US Immigration and Customs Enforcement in Los Angeles.

The charges say the ring of illegal test-takers operated for a period of over seven

years at seven Southern California community colleges and three California State University campuses in Los Angeles, Long Beach and Dominguez Hills.

Between 2002 and 2009, he attended 10 different schools in Southern California, including Cal State L.A., Irvine Valley College and Santa Monica College, according to federal prosecutors. During that time, he studied sociology, marketing, English, business and math.

But Higgins was not a student and was not registered in any of the classes, authorities said. Rather, dozens of foreign students - all from the Middle East - were paying him to sit in class, take exams and write papers so that their student visas would remain valid, according to a charging document filed in the case.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents said the demand for Higgins' services was so great that he hired staff, such as the blond woman who they believe posed as a Middle Eastern man.

This case could implicate stricter visa procedures in the future for students seeking to study in the US and a tougher identity verification process followed by schools when applicants take the mandated exams.

Authorities have not said any of the clients were engaged in terrorist activity and have yet to determine their motives for hiring Higgins. Still, the investigation has alarmed immigration authorities.

Authorities believe Higgins earned hundreds of thousands of dollars helping about 120 people from maintain their student visa status.

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At left and center, students of Arab nationality are seen in detention after being arrested in connection to illegally maintaining their visas through the use of test-takers in these grabbed screen images. At right, a US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officer shows evidence of fake test scores and California identification cards after they were confiscated from a California man charged with operating a ring of illegal test-takers. (AP)



Interior Ministry makes largest ever marijuana bust



Marijuana plants are seen growing in a private garden that was raided by the Interior Ministry Tuesday, netting the ministry's largest ever home-grown marijuana bust in Kuwait. (KUNA)

KUWAIT: Interior Ministry personnel busted a citizen cultivating one of the largest ever marijuana farms found in Kuwait in his private garden in Mubarak Al-Kabeer area, the ministry reported on Tuesday.

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Ports Authority, Civil Aviation Syndicates set to strike over allowances

Nayef Kareem
 Staff Writer

KUWAIT: Head of the Kuwait Ports Authority Workers Syndicate Ali Al-Sukuni on Tuesday said that the union would resort to striking because "all the doors have been shut before it."

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a meeting held by the workers at the authority, he explained that the meeting was convened to pinpoint the demands of employees in a deliberative manner, "particularly since all peaceful diplomatic means to secure those demands have been exhausted to no avail."

Al-Sukuni went on to say that at least 10 special allowances for other government sectors have recently been endorsed,

while the demands of the ports authority workers have been largely ignored for "unknown reasons."

He pointed out that the allowances they have been pushing for cost about 5.5 million Kuwaiti dinars across the board in accordance with the grade and nature of work, adding that employees involved in marine operations and other tough jobs will have larger shares.

According to the syndicate official, there is a shortcoming besetting the Civil Service Commission, noting that the government intends to disburse 100 to 150 Kuwaiti dinars to employees across the board, and that such a move would be considered unjust to the authority's employees.

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Legislative Committee approves Parliament sessions without Cabinet

Interior minister, Al-Tahous argue over dual-nationality hypocrisy

Mohammed Al-Salman
 Staff Writer

KUWAIT: The Parliamentary Legislative Committee on Tuesday decided to consider parliamentary sessions held in the absence of the Cabinet as valid and legitimate. The committee introduced an amendment to the Standing Order of Parliament to substantiate this particular amendment, despite the government's reservations over the decision. It has been gathered that the committee decided to submit its report to the

chamber for a vote. According to committee member Waleed Al-Tabtabaie, the committee equally decided to move misdemeanor interrogations from the Ministry of Interior to the Public Prosecutor's Office while the Investigations Department is to be scrapped.

Earlier Tuesday it had been reported that during the said meeting, a verbal exchange erupted between Minister of Interior Sheikh Jaber Al-Khaled Al-Sabah and MP Khaled Al-Tahous, with the sources giving no further details. However, Committee Chairman Hussein Al-Huraiti stated that what had happened was a mere "difference in opinion," and stressed that the issue must not be blown out of proportion.

For his part, MP Khaled Al-Adwa blasted the Minister of Interior and the "Thamer Committee" for their

"discriminatory approach in dealing with the issue of dual citizenship."

The lawmaker accused officials of the Ministry of Interior and the Thamer Committee of avoiding the pursuit of dual citizenship holders with American or European Union passports "because those individuals hail from the upper-class." He said that, according to the information within his domain, the US Embassy has warned the Ministry of Interior and the government against withdrawing citizenship from the Kuwaiti citizens holding US citizenship.

"The irony lies in the withdrawal of citizenship from dual citizenship holders amongst ordinary Gulf nationals, while other nationals are left untouched."

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Scrapping of projects continues, yet expenditure rises

Compiled by Al Watan Daily

KUWAIT: New oil refinery building and development projects in several Arab countries are locked in obstacles and challenges that could lead to delay or cancellation, the Organization of the Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) said on Tuesday. Such challenges primarily involve uncertainty over future rates of demand for oil derivatives at global

markets, something which complicates efforts to estimate the economic risks of investment projects, the Kuwait-based OAPEC said in its monthly report. The second challenge is the fluctuation of construction material costs, especially during the period leading up to the global financial crisis (mid-2008), resulting in a major change in initial estimates of project costs, it added.

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MPs urge 'peace-loving countries to stop Israeli colonization policy'

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Narcotics led to 44 overdose deaths in 2009

KUWAIT: Approximately 183 drug trading cases, as well as 84 cases of acquisition of narcotics were reported in 2009 in Kuwait, a narcotics expert said Tuesday.

These cases led to 44 deaths due to overdose, Dr. Ayed Al-Humeidan said during an awareness seminar organized by the narcotics combat general department that was held at Salama Bin Qeis Middle School for Boys.

"Drug smugglers are always coming up with new ways to hide their deadly goods, from secret pockets in car cushions all the way to hiding them in DVD cas-

ings, yet men and women of the department managed to crack down on most of these innovative means," Al-Humeidan noted. "Drug cartels are merchants of death and murderers, who would not care less for innocent lives lost due to over intakes of drugs," he said.

The best means of overcoming drug addiction and its destructive impact is through sound consultation, Al-Humeidan pointed out, warning young bodybuilding enthusiasts that using substances with suspicious hormones might lead to mental disorders and physical problems. -KUNA

8th Ring Road project most likely to be cancelled: Sources

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Shuaibah factories complying with closures: EPA

Hamad Al-Sayed
 Staff Writer

KUWAIT: Environment Public Authority (EPA) Director General Dr Salah Al-Moudhi has affirmed that current inspection campaigns conducted on the West Shuaibah factories has shown that the owners of the factories have largely complied with the closure decisions taken against 12 factories. The EPA had closed down three factories for a week and nine others for three days.

The top EPA official made the remarks while addressing reporters following a lecture he delivered under the theme "My Environment is clean" orga-

nized by Khawla Girls' School. Al-Moudhi revealed that a meeting will be held between the authority and the owners of West Shuaibah factories on Wednesday with the aim of responding to their queries about the closure of their factories while underscoring the authority's good will towards them.

The EPA will also emphasize the importance of adhering to set regulations to ward off future occurrences of the violations that led to the closures. On the other hand, Al-Moudhi revealed that the authority is involved in coordinative efforts with municipal authorities to ensure the remediation of the land environment so that vegetation can grow.

Lebanon's rival groups resume national dialogue

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Cyprus police confirm body is ex-leader's corpse

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Biden urges Israel to take risks for peace

JERUSALEM: The US will back those willing to "take risks for peace," US Vice President Joe Biden said Tuesday during the highest-level visit to Israel by an Obama administration official.

Biden said he was pleased that Israelis and Palestinians had agreed this week to resume indirect peace negotiations with US mediation. His two-day visit to Israel seemed clearly aimed at assuaging Israeli concerns that President Obama has been less friendly to Israel than his predecessors, and Biden offered effusive praise.

"Progress occurs in the Middle East when everyone knows there is simply no space between the United States and Israel," he said, a day after the US announced Israelis and Palestinians had agreed to begin indirect peace talks, breaking a 14-month deadlock.

The announcement of indirect talks, which will be held through a US mediator, marked President Barack Obama's first diplomatic breakthrough in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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