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Seven indicted in illegal exports to Iran

COLUMBUS, Ohio, Oct 26 (Reuter) - Seven people have been indicted in an alleged conspiracy to export sensitive electronics equipment to Iran, the Justice Department said on Thursday.

"The shipment of sensitive military radios, scramblers and decoders to a rogue state such as Iran is a serious threat to national security," said Edmund Sargus, U.S. Attorney for Ohio's southern district.

The seven indicted include two Iranian-born U.S. citizens and an official of the Iranian Defence Ministry. If convicted the defendants could face millions of dollars in fines and long prison terms, Sargus said.

Only the two Iranian-Americans are in the United States, Sargus said. The others live either in Iran, which does not have an extradition treaty with the United States, or the United Arab Emirates.

The two U.S. citizens were released from custody after surrendering their passports, Sargus said.

Two trading companies based in Tehran and the United Arab Emirates were also indicted.

"The U.S. Customs Service considers this case to be among the most significant export enforcement investigations in the country in recent years," said Craig Ziegler, resident agent in charge of the Customs Service.

The indictments charge that between 1991 and 1994, about \$500,000 in electronics, communication equipment, computers and other items were exported without an export license, Sargus said.

Radio encryption devices, which can be used to scramble intelligence messages, were of special concern, Sargus told Reuters.

Federal law prohibits any export of some items due to their military sensitivity, and the National Defence Authorisation Act of 1992 specifically prohibits shipment to Iran of any of the items involved.

The 43-count indictment contains charges of conspiracy, money laundering, fraud and illegal exporting and seeks forfeiture of cash and property, Sargus said.

Charged were Elham Abrishami, 42, and Mohsen Abrishami, 42, a married couple who live in Dublin, a Columbus suburb; Behrouz Dolatzadeh, an official with the Iranian Defence Ministry in Tehran; Mohammed Salehizadeh, Hassan Gholan Ali Fallah and Ali Derakhshan, all of Tehran, and Jimsheed Khodagholipour of Hanofeel General Trading Est., a United Arab Emirates company, Sargus said.

Hanofeel and Tak Neda Co. Ltd. of Tehran were the companies indicted, Sargus said.

The indictments charge that through the trading companies, the defendants shipped the items to the United Arab Emirates and from there to Iran, Sargus said.

The indictments also charge that with an unnamed co-conspirator, the U.S. couple had invoices and statements related to the exports altered. The indictments also charge that money to buy the equipment was wired from Iranian banks into accounts in the U.S. controlled by the Abrishamis.

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