

Name: Alert ID: TMML2024039785744 Assistant Attorney General for National Security John C. Demers and U.S. Attorney Erica H. MacDonald today announced the unsealing of a six-count federal indictment against Seyed Sajjad Shahidian, 33, Vahid Vali, 33, and PAYMENT24 for conducting financial transactions in violation of U.S. sanctions against Iran. The defendants were charged with conspiracy to commit offenses against and to defraud the United States, wire fraud, money laundering, and identity theft. Shahidian, who was arrested and extradited from the United Kingdom, made his initial appearance earlier today before Magistrate Judge David T. Schultz in U.S. District Court in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Vali remains at large. According to the allegations in the indictment, PAYMENT24 was an internet-based financial services company with approximately 40 employees and offices in Tehran, Shiraz, and Isfahan, Iran. The primary business of PAYMENT24 was helping Iranian citizens conduct prohibited financial transactions with businesses based in the United States, including the unlawful purchase and exportation of computer software, software licenses, and computer servers from United States companies. According to PAYMENT24's website, the company charged a fee to circumvent "American sanctions," and claimed to have brought in millions of dollars of foreign currency into Iran. According to the allegations in the indictment, beginning in or before 2009 through November 2018, Shahidian, the founder and Chief Executive Officer of PAYMENT24, conspired with Vali, the Chief Operating Officer of PAYMENT24, and other individuals to commit offenses against the United States by violating the restrictions on trade and exports from the United States to Iran. On its website, PAYMENT24 sold a package to assist its Iranian clients with making online purchases from United States-based businesses, which included a PayPal account, a fraudulent "ID card and address receipt," a remote IP address from the United Arab Emirates, and a Visa gift card. The PAYMENT24 website also offered its clients advice on how to create accounts with a foreign identity and how to avoid restrictions on foreign websites, including advising clients to "never attempt to log into those sites with an Iranian IP address." As part of the scheme, Shahidian and Vali made material misrepresentations and omissions to United States-based businesses regarding the destination of the United States-origin goods. In order to accomplish the transactions, Shahidian obtained payment processing accounts from United States-based companies using false residency information, fraudulent passport documents, and other false documents fabricated using the identity and personally identifiable information of another person. Pursuant to the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), unauthorized exports of goods, technology or services to Iran, directly or indirectly from the United States or by a United States person are prohibited. This case is the result of an investigation conducted by the Minneapolis Division of the FBI. The Criminal Division's Office of International Affairs secured the extradition from the United Kingdom with significant assistance from law enforcement authorities in the United Kingdom. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Timothy C. Rank and Charles J. Kovats of the District of Minnesota and Trial Attorney David Aaron of the National Security Division's Counterintelligence and Export Control Section are prosecuting the case.