

10 Accused of scheme to smuggle foreigners

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Body

Federal officials revealed a sting operation Friday that netted more than \$ 650,000 in bribes to an immigration undercover agent and resulted in the arrest of nine people accused of smuggling Asian immigrants into the United States.

The arrests took place Thursday in Atlanta, Los Angeles and Tampa. A 10th suspect, Jung Hsi Hsueh, 35, remained at large late Friday.

Immigration and Naturalization Service officials also have detained 31 of 49 immigrants identified as receiving illegal documents. The immigrants were caught in San Francisco, Dallas, Newark, N.J., and Charlotte, N.C.

Some of the immigrants, who came from Hong Kong, Malaysia and Taiwan, paid up to \$ 65,000 for the illegal documents, officials said.

A 39-count indictment unsealed Friday in Atlanta by U.S. Attorney Joe D. Whitley charges seven foreign nationals and three naturalized American citizens with bribery and conspiracy to obtain INS documents. One suspect also is charged with one count of money-laundering.

Friday's announcement came a week after the INS levied a \$ 1.2 million civil fine against Lane Packing Co. of Fort Valley, Ga., for hiring four men who brought illegal Mexican laborers into the United States. The arrests also came less than a week after President Bush announced a series of stepped-up enforcement measures to curb illegal immigration.

INS District Director Thomas P. Fischer said Thursday's operation was one of the most significant he's seen in 16 years of service.

"It's the most brazen I've ever seen because of the overtures that were made by the individuals," he said. "From the scheme, it has to be fairly sophisticated because it did have worldwide implications."

Officials say the sting started in October 1990 when Mr. Hsueh, a citizen of Taiwan, and two 40-year-old Lilburn residents, Evelyn and Edward Chu, approached an INS agent in Atlanta and offered to pay him about \$ 23,000 to obtain employment authorization and temporary resident cards for illegal immigrants. During the next year, the indictment says, the agent received more than 35 bribes from Mr. Hsueh, the Chus and seven other suspects.

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