

## 6 Chinese nationals indicted in Savannah smuggling scheme

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### **Body**

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A grand jury **indicted** six **Chinese nationals** Wednesday in the most elaborate human **smuggling** operation uncovered in recent Georgia history.

Federal authorities, meanwhile, said they are investigating the possibility that a foreign government played a role in the **smuggling**.

"There is more involvement than what there appeared to be. We're looking into other entities --- private and public," said Thomas Fischer, district director of the Immigration and Naturalization Service in Atlanta. "I'm quite optimistic that we are going to unravel a very unusual, bizarre, sophisticated **smuggling** operation."

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He declined to say which governments his agency is investigating.

Federal agents in **Savannah** found 132 **Chinese** men and boys on Aug. 12 in a secret compartment of the Prince Nicolas, a 42,000-ton freighter. On Wednesday, a grand jury **indicted** three crew members and three "stowaways." Each is charged with conspiracy to **smuggle** and conceal aliens, unlawfully bringing aliens to the United States for commercial advantage and concealing and harboring illegal aliens, said Dan Drake, a spokesman for the U.S. Attorney's Office in **Savannah**.

Authorities say the trade in **smuggling** people from China has exploded into a multibillion-dollar business this decade. They say organized crime groups control much of the trade. Once in the United States or other countries, many immigrants work for years in poor conditions to repay their debt to smugglers known as "snakeheads."

An INS agent testified on Sept. 1 that the immigrants on the Prince Nicolas each paid \$ 40,000 to \$ 49,000 for a trip to the United States.

Most **smuggled Chinese** go to New York City, but saturation of the labor market there has sent some to Atlanta and other places. Authorities have uncovered **smuggling** operations recently in California, Canada, Georgia, Guam, Japan, the Northern Mariana Islands, Midway Islands, New Jersey, New York and Washington state.

Drake identified the **indicted** crew members as Zhang Zhi Zhong, 31, the captain; Shi Ya Dong, 58, the chief engineer; and Sun Cheng, 36, a "cabin boy. " Drake said the "stowaways" **indicted** are Zheng Huan Jian, 25; Zheng Xiao, 34; and Li Guo Guan, whose age was unavailable.

Authorities say the "stowaways" facing charges conspired with the crew to take the immigrants to the United States.

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