

## **Two Saudis to face judge today**

St. Petersburg Times (Florida)

May 23, 2006 Tuesday, 2 Edition

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**Distribution:** TAMPA & STATE; CITY & STATE; METRO & STATE

**Section:** TAMPA & STATE; Pg. 3B

**Length:** 478 words

**Byline:** COLLEEN JENKINS

**Dateline:** TAMPA

### **Body**

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Mana Saleh Almanajam and Shaker Mohsen Alsidran came to the United States via a scholarship program offered by Saudi Arabia to promote cultural understanding between the two countries.

This morning, a Hillsborough judge will try to sort out whether a lack of understanding or something more sinister prompted them to take a ride on a school bus last week.

Circuit Judge Mark Wolfe will conduct a second bail hearing for the two men, who have been in jail since Friday on misdemeanor trespassing charges.

Circuit Judge Monica Sierra revoked their initial bail of \$250 each on Saturday, saying she wanted more background information.

Ahmed Bedier, director of the Central Florida Council on American-Islamic Relations, said two people who tried to post their friends' bail on Friday were told that immigration officials were preventing their release.

But Monday, immigration authorities said they did not place a hold on either man.

"They're not in violation of immigration laws," Immigration and Customs Enforcement spokeswoman Barbara Gonzalez said.

Almanajam, 23, and Alsidran, 20, were placed in jail cells separate from each other and other inmates over the weekend.

On Monday, Almanajam was being held at the Orient Road Jail, while Alsidran was transferred to the Falkenburg Road facility.

"We do that routinely when we have someone who is a high-profile individual," Lt. Paul Perry said.

The two men boarded a school bus headed for Wharton High School on Friday morning. Students alerted their substitute bus driver, who then notified the school district.

By the time the bus arrived on campus, authorities were waiting.

After some initial confusion, law enforcement officials learned the Saudis had been students since January at the English Language Institute at the University of South Florida.

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They are among the 76 Saudi students learning English at the institute through a scholarship program announced by President Bush and Saudi King Abdullah last year. The program aims to boost Saudi enrollment in U.S. universities, which plunged after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

"They went through the screening process like anyone else, and they are qualified to be in the program," USF spokeswoman Lara Wade said of the **two** men.

Bedier visited the students in jail Monday. In Arabic, he explained to them the charges they **face** and the upcoming hearing. No interpreter was present during Saturday's hearing, leaving the men anxious and frustrated, Bedier said.

"In their native country, you can use the public bus system to ride to anywhere, and that's what they thought it was," Bedier said.

"Some people may ask how naive are they to ride a (school) bus ... but they haven't been here in the aftermath of 9/11," he said. "So to them, they're oblivious to the fact that people are afraid of them."

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## Graphic

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PHOTO, (2)

## Classification

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**Language:** ENGLISH

**Publication-Type:** Newspaper

**Subject:** IMMIGRATION (91%); **JUDGES** (90%); IMMIGRATION LAW (90%); CRIMINAL TRESPASS (89%); STUDENTS & STUDENT LIFE (89%); SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION (89%); SCHOLARSHIPS & GRANTS (78%); EDUCATION SYSTEMS & INSTITUTIONS (78%); COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES (78%); CUSTOMS & CULTURAL HERITAGE (78%); MISDEMEANORS (77%); BAIL (76%); PRISONS (76%); PRISONERS (76%); FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION (76%); LAW ENFORCEMENT (75%); MUSLIMS & ISLAM (73%); RELIGION (73%); SEPTEMBER 11 ATTACK (71%); SCHOOL DISTRICTS (71%); CRIMINAL OFFENSES (70%); ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (69%); LANGUAGE ACQUISITION (68%); UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION (68%); TERRORISM (61%); TERRORIST ATTACKS (50%)

**Industry:** MOTORCOACHES & BUSES (89%); EDUCATION SYSTEMS & INSTITUTIONS (78%); COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES (78%); SCHOOL & EMPLOYEE BUS SERVICES (76%); URBAN TRANSIT SYSTEMS (71%)

**Person:** ABDULLAH BIN ABDUL AZIZ (79%)

**Geographic:** FLORIDA, USA (92%); SAUDI ARABIA (94%); UNITED STATES (92%)

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**Load-Date:** May 23, 2006

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