

Israel indicts French immigrants in \$10M scam

By DANIEL ESTRIN
Associated Press

JERUSALEM — Israel's state prosecutor indicted four new immigrants from France on Wednesday for allegedly running a major international scam, impersonating company executives and costing five European companies about 9.1 million euros, or over \$10 million.

The companies that lost money included German electronics retailer MediaMarkt, Belgian electronics company Eldi, European supermarket chain Cora, multinational perfume chain ICI Paris XL and Dutch hardware store owner Intergamma, according to the indictment.

About two dozen other companies were also entangled in the case, including candy maker Mars, high fashion company Chanel, Italian athletic clothing retailer Diadora, beer brewing giant Anheuser-Busch InBev, and car manufacturers Kia Motors and Toyota, though not all the companies fell for the trick, according to the indictment.

The case suggests that the so-called fake CEO scam is still thriving in Israel, where the man widely credited with pioneering the technique, Gilbert Chikli, continues to live openly, evading French attempts to arrest him.

Chikli is not suspected in the current case. The French-born defendants were identified as Henri Omessi, Daniel Michael Allon, Jeremy Lalloum and Mordechai Lellouche. They appeared at a court hearing on Wednesday. Rotem Tubul, a lawyer for Omessi, said her client and the other defendants pleaded not guilty.

"Because it involves evidence from many countries around the world, there are clear difficulties in handling this case in Israel, and it is doubtful whether it will be possible to overcome them," said Liya Felus, an attorney for Allon.

Israeli prosecutors says the immigrants collected information on European companies, including names of company employees and details on vendors with which they did business.



AP Photo/Oded Balilty, File

In this March 28, file photo, Gilbert Chikli, 50, and his wife Shirly Chikli, 31, pose for a photo at their home in Ashdod, Israel. Israeli police said they have busted a new crime ring in which French and Italian immigrants posed as company executives to bilk millions of dollars from dozens of multinational companies. The case suggests that the so-called fake CEO scam is still thriving in Israel, where Chikli, the man widely credited with inventing it continues to evade French attempts to arrest him.

Then, according to prosecutors, they created fake email accounts to send forged documents to an employee in charge of finances, presenting themselves as a CEO or representative of a vendor. They would then instruct the employee to send money to a new "clearing firm" used by the vendor. In reality, the clearing firms were shell companies with bank accounts controlled by the defendants.

In one scam that took place in November and December, according to Wednesday's indictment, defendants impersonated an executive of German electronics giant Bosch and emailed an executive of Eldi, telling him that Bosch had begun to work with a new clearing firm and asking him to update his records with the firm's new bank account information.

Later, Eldi transferred 794,175.70 euros owed to Bosch to the shell company's bank account at PKO Bank Polski, Poland's largest bank.

In another scam, according to prosecutors, defendants impersonated an employee of Swedish home appliance company Electrolux, and tricked German electronics retailer MediaMarkt into sending them more than 1 million euros.

Defendants also allegedly impersonated the chief financial officer of Mars — the manufacturer of M&Ms

and Snickers candy — and convinced supermarket chain Cora to send 322,264.70 euros owed to Mars to their bank account instead. Meanwhile, the defendants allegedly impersonated a Cora representative and tried to convince Mars that the money transfer was delayed for technical reasons.

In the biggest single scam, the defendants, allegedly impersonating an employee of Chanel, convinced ICI Paris XL to transfer nearly 5.5 million euros to an account at a Slovakian branch of the Bulgarian bank UniCredit Bulbank.

In March, two Italian-born immigrants, Enzo Bondi and Yitzhak Sonino, were allegedly recruited to expand the con to entrap companies in Italy. The prosecutor indicted them in a separate case for attempting — but failing — to steal money from Diners Club Italia and other companies.

It is unclear how the defendants got the money from their European bank accounts to Israel. One defendant tried to launder some of the ill-gained money by depositing sums of cash into a currency exchange business, and in turn, an employee of the business tried to deposit the money in smaller amounts into the defendant's and others' bank accounts, but each time, Israeli banks rejected the money as suspicious, prosecutors say.

WHEAT: Harvest usually begins around July 4

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averages about an inch of precipitation for June, though totals may vary depending on location. Areas east of town usually see a little more rain, while areas west of town usually see a little less. Currently, the whole region is down about a quarter-inch of rain for the month, though Flowers said early season precipitation was much better than it was a year ago.

"Our saving grace this year is we've had a more normal crop year for average rainfall," he said. "It's looking like, with the extra moisture, the crop is going to fare better."

Not surprisingly, Flowers said the fields are maturing

more quickly around Lexington and Heppner, where harvest usually begins sometime around the Fourth of July. In higher rainfall areas, such as Helix and Adams, harvest takes place closer to the middle of the month.

Though he's based out of Corvallis, Flowers is no stranger to Eastern Oregon, where the majority of the state's wheat is grown. He was in the area on Tuesday and Wednesday, talking with local growers about conditions in their fields and last weekend's heat wave.

"It's going to be another early year for us, just like last year," he said.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Umatilla County harvested

11.3 million bushels of winter wheat in 2015, and 3 million bushels in Morrow County. Those yields came after three consecutive years of drought. In 2012, the totals were 16.3 million bushels in Umatilla County and 5.4 million in Morrow County.

If conditions can stay cool, Flowers said he is hopeful they can buck the trend and get back to a closer-to-average harvest this year.

"We hope cooler temperatures will lengthen that grain-fill period as long as we can," he said. "That will be the crop."

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CANCER: Kuykendall plans to attend BMCC

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speaking about their experiences in front of various groups and getting involved in events like Relay for Life. But Kuykendall said he prefers to move on as much as possible, focusing on schoolwork, friends and planning his future.

He plans to attend Blue Mountain Community College in the fall, where he wants to earn an associate's degree in science or psychology before moving on to a university somewhere in the Pacific Northwest and studying to become a mental health therapist.

His mother Sheila Kuykendall said she's "ecstatic" to see her son graduate on time despite missing so much school for his illness.

"It's been one heck of a ride getting him there,"

she said.

She has been Tieler's cheerleader the whole way, but she said there have been a lot of other people who helped. Teachers and counselors were patient and accommodating, she said, and his friends didn't let him fall behind.

"His friends really encouraged him," she said. "They said, 'Come on Tieler, you have to walk with the class.'"

It wasn't easy completing all of his classes after missing so much school his sophomore year, however. Tieler said he continues to miss school sometimes for the lingering side effects, including severe headaches, and trips to see his doctors in Portland every few months. He was thrilled after being cleared to play football again in his junior year of high school, but ended up leaving

the team as a senior to focus on reaching graduation.

"I missed (football) a little, but then again I was more worried about getting my school work done," he said.

His doctor told him recently that it was probably good he had not played a contact sport this year, because the space where his tumor used to be has formed a cyst, which needs to be drained.

For now, however, he's just looking forward to a summer without homework.

"I just want to take a break," he said.

Umatilla High School's graduation will take place Saturday at 10 a.m. at the high school, 1400 Seventh Street.

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FIRE: Mailing Made Easy is taking donations for the family

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Jeremie said.

Their daughter JaNessa, who will be a senior in the fall, also lost items, including some of the clothing she wears to events as a Umatilla County Fair princess. The Prewitts' third daughter Skylar is not living at home but had some things stored there.

Cyndi and Jeremie said the help they have received since has been extremely humbling, starting with three of Ayden's friends who refused to leave their side the night of the fire.

"They missed out on their graduation party to stay with us," Cyndi said, wiping away tears.

Employers have offered paid time off to deal with the aftermath of the fire, Jeremie's mother Donna Anderson has let them stay with her, and friends and strangers alike have donated clothing, gift certificates and other items. Mailing Made Easy, where Cyndi works, is acting as a drop-off point for donations, and other people



Staff photo by Jade McDowell

The Prewitt family poses for a photo at Hermiston High School's graduation on Saturday shortly before their home burned down. Pictured from left to right are Donna Anderson, JaNessa Prewitt, Ayden Prewitt, Jeremie Prewitt, Skylar Prewitt and Cyndi Prewitt.

have reached out through Facebook asking how they can help while the Prewitts rebuild their home.

"There has been a tremendous outpouring of people wanting to help," Jeremie said. "It's been very comforting."

Cyndi's coworker Carla Osborne-James said she started the collection box at Mailing Made Easy because the Prewitts have always been very active volunteers.

"They are such a giving

family with their time and anything else our community needs," she wrote in a Facebook message. "They deserve our help."

Sometimes it's easier to give help than to receive it, however.

"It's hard to accept help when we're used to being the ones helping," Cyndi said.

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Modi to Congress: India, U.S. can anchor stability in Asia

WASHINGTON (AP) — Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi told the U.S. Congress on Wednesday that the world's two largest democracies can anchor stability and prosperity from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific in an aspirational speech that glossed over continuing divisions in the relationship.

Modi, who has ushered in closer bilateral ties since taking power two years ago, said that India and the U.S. have overcome "the hesitations of history" and called for ever-stronger economic and defense links between the two countries.

Speaking in English, Modi used dashes of humor, drawing a parallel between the rough-and-tumble politics of his own nation and the U.S., which he described tongue-in-cheek as "harmonious" and well-known for bipartisanship. Modi, a keen advocate of yoga, also referenced cultural ties, citing estimates that "more Americans bend for yoga than to throw a curve ball."

Modi paid tribute to the role of Congress, including through a civilian nuclear deal in 2008 that lifted U.S. export restrictions on nuclear technology to India and which is hoped to lead to a contract by mid-2017 for the construction of six power reactors by U.S.-based Westinghouse Electric Co.

He also praised Congress for "refusing to reward" those who preach and practice terrorism. Although Modi avoided direct mention of Pakistan, he was alluding to lawmakers recently blocking a proposed, U.S.-subsidized sale of F-16 fighter jets to India's archrival.

"A strong India-U.S.



AP Photo/Evan Balilty, File

Vice President Joe Biden and House Speaker Paul Ryan of Wis. applaud Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his address to a joint meeting of Congress on Capitol Hill in Washington, Wednesday.

partnership can anchor peace, prosperity and stability from Asia to Africa and from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific," Modi said.

Modi's 46-minute speech followed years of being shunned in the U.S. because of religious violence in his home state. It came a day after a White House meeting with President Barack Obama and was followed by a lunch with congressional leaders and a reception hosted by the House and Senate Foreign Affairs committees.

U.S.-India relations have been transformed since Rajiv Gandhi in 1985 became the first of five Indian prime ministers to have addressed a joint meeting of Congress. During the Cold War, U.S. was more focused on ties with Pakistan, and many in Washington believed India, with its "non-aligned" foreign policy, was far too friendly with the Soviet Union.

Today, the U.S. and Indian militaries conduct more drills with each other than with any other nation. While India resists the notion of becoming

a U.S. ally, both nation share concern over China's rise and over freedom of navigation in the Asia-Pacific region.

Although Modi lauded both nations' common democratic principles and hailed two heroes of nonviolence, India's Mahatma Gandhi and civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., he did not address congressional concerns his government's record on religious tolerance and other rights issues.

"I wish there had been an emphasis on cooperating with the U.S. and every other democracy on combating all human rights abuses, especially human trafficking and slavery," said Republican Rep. Chris Smith of New Jersey.

But the overall response from lawmakers of both parties was positive. "We're now standing shoulder-to-shoulder in ways that no one would have imagined a generation ago," Rep. Eliot Engel of New York, the top-ranking Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said of the bilateral relationship.

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