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X@QueensDAKatz

QUEENS COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY
125-01 QUEENS BOULEVARD
KEW GARDENS, NEW YORK 11415-1568

718.286.6000
WWW.QUEENSDA.ORG



MELINDA KATZ
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

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CONTACT: PRESS OFFICE (718) 286-6315
QDACommunications@queensda.org

FOUR DEFENDANTS ACCUSED OF RUNNING MAIL-ORDER KETAMINE OPERATION FROM QUEENS

Group Allegedly Ran Darknet Drug Business that Shipped Ketamine Orders from Multiple Post Offices for Crypto Payments; Defendants Collected $75,000 or More in Sales
Face up to 20 Years in Prison, if Convicted

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz and DEA New York Enforcement Division Special Agent in Charge Farhana Islam announced today that four Queens defendants have been charged with operating as a major trafficker, criminal possession of a controlled substance, conspiracy and other charges following a months-long investigation in coordination with the DEA's New York Cyber Investigations Group and the United States Postal Inspector. The quartet allegedly operated an online ketamine distribution business on the Nexus darknet market, selling the drug in exchange for cryptocurrency payments. Over several months, investigators tracked members of the operation as they allegedly fulfilled dozens of online orders from locations in Bayside and shipped packages containing ketamine through post offices in Westchester County and Connecticut.

District Attorney Katz said: "These defendants are charged with operating a darknet drug store selling ketamine in exchange for cryptocurrency. They fulfilled dozens of illicit purchases -- distinctively packed with fentanyl test strips -- from various post offices in Westchester County and Connecticut. We are committed to dismantling drug rings in Queens County that endanger lives and the safety of our communities. I thank the DEA New York Enforcement Division and the U.S. Postal Inspector for their work on this case."

DEA New York Enforcement Division Special Agent in Charge Farhana Islam said: "The darknet is not a safe haven for drug traffickers, and cryptocurrency will not shield them from justice. These defendants turned online marketplaces and our postal system into a nationwide drug distribution network, putting profits ahead of public safety. Thanks to the outstanding investigative work of our DEA Cyber Investigations Group and our law enforcement partners, this operation was disrupted, resulting in the seizure of approximately three kilograms of ketamine. Let this serve as a warning: Whether you're operating on our streets or hiding behind a computer screen, the DEA will track you down, dismantle your operation, and bring you to justice."

Bai Ning, 35, Dennis Wang, 34, and Tianning He, 39, all from Oakland Gardens, and Yongliang Wang 39, of Flushing, were jointly arraigned November 10 by Queens Criminal Court Judge Jennifer Saint-Preux on a 14-count criminal complaint charging them with operating as a major trafficker, criminal possession of a controlled substance in the fourth degree, nine counts of criminal sale of a controlled substance in the fourth degree, conspiracy in the fourth degree and two counts of criminally using drug paraphernalia in the second degree.

On November 13, Queens Supreme Court Justice Anthony Battisti ordered the defendants to return to court on December 11 and December 14. If convicted, the defendants face up to 20 in prison.

DA Katz said that, according to the charges and investigation, on March 3, an investigator from the District Attorney's Detective Bureau, purchased two items advertised as "Best Quality Online Ketamine 100% Pure S-Isomer" from the KetaKingdom vendor account on the Nexus darknet market. On March 11, the investigator received a mail parcel containing two packages: a clear ziplock bag with white powder contents and a fentanyl test strip, and a second small ziplock bag containing a white rock-like substance and a fentanyl strip. Both contents were drug tested by the DEA and determined to be positive for ketamine.

Further investigation, in coordination with the DEA, linked the KetaKingdom vendor account and an associated Kraken cryptocurrency account to defendant Tianning He. Investigators subsequently

identified He's associates, including Bai Ning, Dennis Wang and Yongliang Wang, as well as an additional unapprehended individual. Members of the DA's Detective Bureau Cybercrime and Cryptocurrency Unit continued to trace the flow of cryptocurrency from multiple darknet markets to cryptocurrency addresses that were controlled by the defendants.

Investigators observed members of the group accessing a shared storage unit in Bayside and making frequent visits to a location on 47th Road in Queens. They also tracked the unapprehended individual and one of the defendants delivering dozens of packages to post offices in Westchester County and Connecticut. The packages, bearing shipping labels generated through a single Pirate Ship account, were seized pursuant to search warrants and confirmed to contain ketamine packaged with fentanyl test strips.

A search of the Bayside storage unit uncovered postal packaging materials and empty Amazon boxes associated with the shipping account. Investigators also linked Dennis Wang to approximately 38 visits to the 47th Road location, each coinciding with transactions on the KetaKingdom vendor account.

On November 8, members of the DEA and the DA's Detective Bureau executed a warrant at a 224th Street location. Investigators recovered $20,000 cash, two laptop computers, 20 cellphones, a bag containing ketamine, and a debit card with the same name as a card on the Pirate Ship account. They later recovered an additional debit card with the same name from defendant Ning Bai's wallet.

On November 9, a search warrant was executed at the 47th Road location and investigators recovered postal service shipping labels, a bag of ketamine, Amazon labels, fentanyl testing strip instructions, and two laptop computers. A search warrant was also executed at a Burling Street location in Flushing and investigators recovered packing supplies, vials, a scale, a laptop, tape, ketamine in powder and rock form and other items. A total of 3 kilograms of ketamine was recovered. Investigators also observed a darknet market advertisement for the KetaKingdom vendor site listing rock ketamine for the price of $49.92 per gram.

The investigation was conducted by members of the Cybercrime and Cryptocurrency Unit of the District Attorney's Detective Bureau, the DEA NY Cyber Investigations Group, and the United States Postal Inspector. The United States Custom and Border Protection New York Field Office, the Air National Guard, and NYPD Detective Christopher Haws along with K9 Porter provided crucial assistance.

Assistant District Attorney Elizabeth Speck, Unit Chief of the Cyber Crimes Unit in the District Attorney's Financial Frauds Bureau, and Assistant District Attorney Catherine Jahn, Section Chief in the Financial Frauds Bureau, are prosecuting the case under the supervision of Talia Vogel, Deputy Bureau Chief, and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Joseph T. Conley III.

Criminal complaints and indictments are accusations. A defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

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