

Former airline official admits rigging rewards scheme

Denies involvement of wife who faces abetment charge.

- By Bassam Za'za', Senior Reporter
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Dubai: A former client services officer of Emirates airline admitted in court yesterday that he committed electronic fraud and created bogus accounts before transferring 2.6 million skyward miles to airline tickets issued by the company only to transfer them back into his account.

"That's right, yes, I am guilty... I committed that mistake and I regret it," E.O., 35, said when he appeared before the Dubai Court of First Instance.

Prosecutors accused the Kenyan of abusing his public office [being a client services officer at Emirates] and embezzling nearly Dh60,000 worth of tickets. He was charged with committing e-fraud by abusing the skyward miles system and creating 2,000 bogus accounts [for real passengers] before transferring their air-miles to his account while issuing the tickets. E.O.'s wife, D.A. [who works as a travel agent], was accused of aiding and abetting him. "It is true... I am guilty. But my wife has nothing to do with this case and she did not know," E.O. contended before Presiding Judge Al Saeed Mohammad Barghout. "That's not true... I did not help him," D.A., 33, said when she defended herself in courtroom four.

According to the arraignment sheet, E.O. was charged with committing e-fraud, abusing public service and embezzling public money. D.A. was charged with aiding and abetting him. An Iranian safety officer testified the incident was discovered soon after a British woman sought to open a skyward account with Emirates airlines.

Opening account

"The British lady called wanting to open a skyward account... when we informed her that she already had one, she denied making one. We checked the account which carried her name and exact personal details, but the e-mail address was different. That particular account had been established in the UAE, meanwhile she had called from Britain. The same e-mail was listed in several other skyward accounts bearing names of different clients... then we discovered that E.O. was the one who established all those accounts," claimed the officer during prosecution questioning.

Prosecution records revealed that the suspect had transferred the air-miles to free tickets which he used to travel to and from Nairobi.

The safety officer claimed that E.O. denied his involvement when they confronted him. "He established nearly 2,000 bogus accounts using real passengers' names but used his e-mail account... he used nearly 2.6 million skyward miles and issued tickets worth more than Dh60,000. He sold some of the tickets and used the others for himself," alleged the Iranian.

Records said D.A. used to direct passengers to E.O. A verdict will be issued on October 5.

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