

Small boat people smuggler jailed

A man who organised cross-Channel people smuggling attempts has been jailed for 3 years and 4 months on 8 July.

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Sarbast Mohammed Hama, 31, of no fixed UK address, pleaded guilty to assisting unlawful immigration at Lewes Crown Court in a case led by Immigration Enforcement Criminal and Financial Investigations (CFI).

A CFI investigation was started into Hama, who is an Iraqi national, after he was discovered on board a rigid-hulled inflatable boat (RHIB) in the early hours of 27 March 2019.

The vessel had been intercepted close to Folkestone by a Border Force cutter with 13 migrants, including 2 children, on board. Home Office checks revealed Hama had been encountered previously on a different RHIB off the coast of Deal on 25 December 2018 with 10 other Iraqi nationals. Following this, he had presented himself as an Iranian national and submitted an immigration application which was ongoing. When he was encountered in the Channel for a second time in March, Hama was arrested on suspicion of assisting unlawful immigration.

Steve Whitton, from Border Force's maritime command said:

When he was intercepted by Border Force, Hama was involved in reckless attempts to smuggle people, including young children, into the UK. The vessels used were unfit to cross the channel in the best of conditions, let alone in the middle of winter.

Our cutter and coastal patrol vessel crews will continue to work closely with CFI colleagues to ensure those responsible for this

type of dangerous and illegal crossing face justice.

CFI enquiries revealed that the vessel used in March 2019 was purchased the day before the crossing from a watersports shop in the Netherlands and was paid for in cash. CCTV showed Hama on the 22 March and 26 March purchasing a RHIB on each occasion as well as boat motors and lifejackets. Hama can be seen signing a receipt on the 22 March. Footage from the 26 March also shows Hama changing the number plates on his car outside the shop.

Assistant Director David Fairclough, from CFI, said:

It was detailed forensic examination of the vessel involved in the March incident – conducted by colleagues from the National Crime Agency – that identified where the boat had been purchased.

That was a real breakthrough and the CCTV we collected from the Netherlands made for a damning case against Hama.

This complex investigation is an excellent example of law enforcement agencies working effectively together to strike people smuggling at source and tackle the criminals behind these extremely dangerous crossings.

People smuggling by small boats is not an issue that any agency can solve in isolation, but working closely with our partners at home and abroad we will continue to put those involved in this type of criminality before the courts.

Anyone with information about suspected immigration abuse can contact Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111 anonymously or visit <http://www.crimestoppers-uk.org>.