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How Fuad and Omar Kiram Sold a Nation That Wasn't Theirs...



Omar Kiram and Fuad Kiram, pictured together in 2006.

Image Source: Royal Sulu

FRAUD Kiram: The Royal Ruse of Professional Conmen, Fuad and Omar Kiram

They say if you send money to a Nigerian prince, you might lose a few thousand. But trusting a self-styled Southeast Asian sultan claiming access to trillions in hidden gold could entangle you in one of the most calculated sovereignty scams of the century. For nearly two decades, Fuad Kiram and his advisor, the late Omar Kiram, ran a high-stakes fraud fueled by forged royalty, invented fortunes, and staged diplomacy.

Fuad, a self-proclaimed Sultan of Sulu, leaned on tenuous ancestral ties to present himself as a legitimate monarch—recognized by some and discredited by many. He is now infamous for his pursuit of a scandal-ridden international arbitration award and his 2023 designation as a terrorist by Malaysia. By his side was Omar Kiram (formerly Duque Rodrigo Dux de Legazpi de Vivar-Maniquiz), an Australian-Filipino businessman who adopted the Kiram name and posed as nobility to amplify the operation. Together, they engineered a pseudo-royal enterprise built on elaborate titles, bogus rituals, and ceremonial theatrics—exchanging these trappings for money, loyalty, and the illusion of statehood.

Titles for Sale

One of Fuad's and Omar's most blatant scams was the sale and strategic distribution of fake noble titles. A 2012 exposé by the Sabah Claim Society revealed that Fuad and Omar marketed bogus knighthoods, baronies, and ambassadorships under the name "Royal Hashemite Sultanate of Sulu and Sabah" (RHSSS)—an entity unrecognized by any legitimate government.

"These men are not authorized by any state or sovereign institution. They are charlatans peddling lies under the guise of royal tradition," the group declared.

Omar, appointed by Fuad as the Grand Master of the Royal Orders, issued ornate certificates and public announcements that gave the titles an air of legitimacy. Many recipients, misled by the ceremonial pomp, paid significant sums believing they were gaining diplomatic influence or elite status. According to Fuad's ex-wife, Farida, many titles were priced between \$40 and \$100, though more elaborate or prestigious-sounding honors were sold at much higher rates. This tiered pricing structure offered illusionary status to the masses while reserving grander façades for those willing to pay more.

The title scam served multiple functions. In many cases, it generated revenue through direct sale. In others, titles were bestowed on friends and allies of the Kiram duo or well-connected individuals who might lend legitimacy or open doors to diplomatic or financial circles. To protect this carefully constructed network of payoffs and posturing, Fuad and Omar insisted on control after they ran into copy-cats: "No one is allowed to ask for fund or money on behalf of His Majesty Sultan Muhammad Fuad A. Kiram I and the Royal House of Sulu & Sabah... without the written and signed consent from His Majesty... and HRH Prince Omar Kiram." This message, once posted on an official RHSSS website, reinforced the Kirams' grip on the entire operation—in effect, it declared that only they could run the grift, closing ranks around a system of gatekeeping and staged authority. Fuad and Omar used these appointments to construct a pseudo-government—installing loyal supporters as "ambassadors" and "nobles" who, often unknowingly, furthered the facade of a sovereign regime.

Omar's own elevation to "Crown Prince" came through a private arrangement. Omar—a non-relative—allegedly provided early financial and strategic backing to Fuad in exchange for royal status. He adopted the Kiram surname, constructing the appearance of blood ties, and became central to the public projection of the Sultanate.

Online complaints later surfaced about email solicitations from “Prince Omar,” who claimed kinship with Fuad and promoted investments linked to gold and historical bonds. In one message, Omar denied connections to rival conspiracy theories like the Tallano-Tagean hoax while invoking noble lineage to solicit money—an opportunistic tactic of discrediting others while preserving his own.

Beyond vanity, the scheme had long-term ambition. If Fuad died, Omar appeared positioned as heir to the self-proclaimed throne and potentially a beneficiary of the multibillion-dollar arbitration case over Sabah.

Despite a 2006 revocation letter from Sultan Muedzul Lail Tan Kiram—Fuad’s nephew and the legitimate heir—stripping both men of any right to act on the Sultanate’s behalf, they continued unabated. That letter came only after Fuad had already tried to hijack the throne by scandalizing Muedzul with false accusations of immoral conduct, branding him ‘haram’ and unfit to rule. Though these charges were later debunked with official documentation, Fuad refused to step back. Instead, he doubled down on the false narrative and continued posing as the rightful Sultan, supported by his fictional banners. The episode laid bare Fuad’s willingness to sabotage his own kin in order to manufacture credibility for his own claim—a move that foreshadowed the manipulative frauds that would follow.

I revoke the title and privilege I have given to my uncle as the Regent Sultan of Sabah on 1425 A.H. (2004). As well as the Title of Datu/ Datuk I have given to Dux de Legazpi a.k.a. Duque de Vivar Maniquiz a.k.a. Prince Datu Omar Kiram. Any letter or documents bearing their names shall not be treated as official by my court and the Sultanate of Sulu.

Selection of Sultan Muedzul’s memo of revocation (2006).

Image Source: Kiram Family Blog

Undeterred by formal rejection, the Kirams pressed on with their charade. Omar’s grand titles—Grand Prince & Marshal, Foreign Minister, and Grand Master—were regularly promoted by the RHSS. The ceremonies continued too. In 2015, they staged a knighthood ceremony for Sierra Leone’s President Ernest Bai Koroma. Other recipients of Fuad’s and Omar’s honorary titles included The Hon. Datuk Sir Henry Muganwa Kajura, Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Uganda; The Hon. Datuk Sir Mari Akatiri, Prime Minister of East Timor; and The Hon. Datuk Sir Arif Sagan, Commissioner of National Elections of East Timor. All were granted high-ranking honors within the Royal Order of Sulu and Sabah, such as Knight Grand Commander and Knight Commander distinctions. “The RHSS Cultural Ambassador” (another falsified title and role) attempted to justify these honors with the line: “Indeed, these Royal Awards of Knighthood are free to all recipients, and are granted solely on the basis of merit, not on the honoree’s ability to pay.” Ironically, this open letter was written by a titleholder himself—a Datuk of the Royal Order of Sulu and Sabah, a Hereditary Knight, and Baronet of the Royal Order of Kiram—complete with an assigned coat of arms. The so-called “merit” he referred to was in reality an almost overt admission: only those national leaders who publicly supported Fuad’s claim to the sultanate were awarded such titles. Though framed as diplomatic outreach, the practice followed a clear pattern: sell titles for money, or give them in exchange for strategic endorsement. Every grant, honorary or otherwise, served a calculated effort to trade illusion for influence.

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An example of the fabricated coat of arms issued with the RHSSS titles—this one granted to the same titleholder who publicly defended the fraudulent system in an open letter.

Image Source: Cultural Ambassador

False Treasures and Fictional Bonds

At the core of their narrative was the claim that the Sulu Sultanate held over \$3 trillion in gold—allegedly entrusted to WWII-era custodians and hidden in global banks. Fuad and Omar alleged this treasure could finance the Sultanate’s restoration and enrich its supporters.

The story quickly unraveled. Fuad and Omar approached major financial institutions—including UBS and Citibank—asserting they were the rightful owners of such secret accounts. Both banks rejected the claims outright, citing the absence of any legitimate documentation.

Despite this, they weaponized the fantasy to attract believers. Like an international spin on the Nigerian prince scam, they promised unimaginable wealth in return for financial, legal, or political support to “unlock” the gold. It was a classic bait-and-switch: dangle hidden riches, then exploit belief in royal authority to solicit allegiance and investment. The gold narrative wasn’t just absurd—it was predatory.

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As that story lost traction, the Kiram network shifted course. In 2018, Omar Kiram and Faisal Rana—a Fuad-appointed “Baron Knight” and “Ambassador-at-Large to Islamic Nations”—registered the Sovereign Mindanao Foundation Limited in the UK. That same month, Faisal received his fifth noble title

in a year, a rapid string of honors that culminated with his appointment as “Deputy Grand Master under the Royal Orders.” The foundation was a front—registered with Faisal’s business address and tied to Fuad and Omar’s invented monarchy. A self-declared high-yield investment expert, Faisal appeared eager for status, but was ultimately positioned to take the fall. Fuad and Omar remained insulated, while he bore the liability. The conman, it turned out, had been used.

By 2021, the gold narrative was overtaken by their so-called ‘Historical Assets Redemption Program’—a high-yield investment scheme based on unverifiable Floating Rate Notes allegedly stored in Davao City. The deal promised 80% of proceeds for humanitarian causes and 20% for intermediaries, including Omar and “Baron Faisal.” It mirrored patterns common in global financial fraud: fictitious assets presented as charitable opportunities while profits quietly funneled to insiders. The U.S. Department of the Treasury’s Office of Inspector General has warned that scams involving historical bonds often use complex but worthless instruments—like Floating Rate Notes or WWII-era gold—marketed through informal networks and adorned with ceremonial credentials to appear legitimate. Though presented as benevolent, the program relied on unverifiable claims and empty financial promises. While Fuad Kiram’s name was omitted—likely to shield him during his ongoing arbitration scandal—he presided over the fictitious sovereign hierarchy that empowered both men, making them subordinate to his authority and integral to the fraud’s execution.

Tied to their gold and arbitration claims, these schemes created a narrative echo chamber—a self-reinforcing web of false authority, historical distortion, and sovereign pretense, all designed to attract funding. Whether offering gold, bond payouts or royal appointments, their strategy remained unchanged: invent the treasure, crown the seller, and monetize the myth.

Assorted Ploys and Power Plays

In addition to their headline schemes, Fuad and Omar were linked to a variety of revealing episodes—scams and manipulations of differing scales and timing— that further exposed the extent of their self-serving maneuvering. A minor but telling incident emerged in Zamboanga City, where a local hotel reportedly sought payment from Omar Kiram for unpaid bills—an allegation that remains unresolved. Though small in scale, it mirrored a familiar theme: habitual evasion of accountability cloaked in self-bestowed entitlement. Fuad and Omar often promoted themselves as champions of the everyday Sulu or Tausug, but involvement in a petty dine-and-dash scam at a local hotel revealed the emptiness of that narrative.

Another lesser-known claim surfaced in 2013, when the *Defenders of Philippine Sovereignty* accused Fuad and Omar of conspiring with Indonesian actors in what was described as a “sting operation.” The duo allegedly partnered with an Islamic fundamentalist school in Java to create the appearance of destabilizing religious ties—purportedly in an effort to pressure Malaysia into offering hush money. While the report lacks the verification seen in their more documented schemes, the pattern aligns: devise a threat, imply leverage, and seek payout.

Their most elaborate fabrication, however, was legal. In 2019, Fuad launched a \$32 billion arbitration case against Malaysia over Sabah, citing a contested 1878 lease agreement. With Omar reportedly helping to secure litigation funding through Therium Capital, the case progressed and culminated in a staggering \$14.92 billion award in 2022. That decision—now under appeal—has been widely discredited

and has come to represent the apex of their "Sulu Fraud." Far from a legal anomaly, it was the global extension of a long-running deception. Ironically, the case was led by Paul Cohen, a lawyer recognized for his expertise in fraud litigation—raising the question of whether he knowingly lent legal credibility to a contrived claim, or whether even a fraud specialist had been strategically misled by the Kirams' performance.

To build political support, Fuad issued an open letter to the Sulu people, promising sweeping social benefits in exchange for loyalty. "Our policy is to provide FREE hospitals and FREE medicines, FREE education and FREE community housing for the old, widows, orphans, the sick and the poor," he wrote. He also pledged retirement villages and university partnerships to offer "FREE first class education." These grand promises were not policies—they were carefully crafted propaganda, designed to cast Fuad as a benevolent leader and secure local and international legitimacy.

Yet in all his years claiming inherited rule over Sulu, Fuad has demonstrated no meaningful service to his people—only hollow displays of leadership. And that same narrative of entitlement and spectacle was exported beyond Sulu, repackaged for arbitrators, financiers, and foreign courts as the foundation for one of the most audacious legal scams in modern memory.

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The Fallout

The true victims were the Tausug people—those Fuad and Omar claimed to represent. No gold was recovered. No wealth distributed. No sovereign state restored. The promises were hollow, the money vanished, and the legacy defiled.

Legitimate heirs and community leaders have publicly denounced both men. Once a name synonymous with maritime authority and dignity, "Kiram" now evokes deceit and manipulation.

Fuad and Omar took a proud legacy and turned it into a deception—built on fabricated lineage, gold fantasies, phony honors, and legal theater. It wasn't a misunderstanding. It was a calculated operation. They manufactured a con that exploited memory, money, and myth to defraud Fuad's own people and deceive the world. Now, with Omar gone, the burden of accountability rests squarely on Fuad's shoulders. Justice—for the Tausug, for the Sultanate, and for those exploited on the international stage—demands that he be held to it. With the upcoming arbitration appeal set for July 7, there remains a narrow opportunity for the international community, legal institutions, and those complicit in amplifying Fuad's false claims to begin delivering long-overdue retribution. But a larger reckoning is still to come.

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