

JUSTICE NEWS

Department of Justice

Office of Public Affairs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Monday, November 13, 2017

Last Defendant in the United States Pleads Guilty in Multimillion Dollar India-Based Call Center Scam Targeting U.S. Victims

All 24 Defendants in the United States Have Pleaded Guilty; 61 Charged in Total

An Illinois man pleaded guilty today to money laundering conspiracy, joining six other defendants who recently pleaded guilty to conspiracy charges for their roles in liquidating and laundering victim payments generated through a massive telephone impersonation fraud and money laundering scheme perpetrated by a network of India-based call centers responsible for defrauding U.S. residents of hundreds of millions of dollars.

Acting Assistant Attorney General Kenneth A. Blanco of the Justice Department's Criminal Division, Acting U.S. Attorney Abe Martinez of the Southern District of Texas, Acting Deputy Director Peter T. Edge of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Inspector General J. Russell George of the U.S. Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA) and Inspector General John Roth of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General (DHS-OIG) made the announcement.

Miteshkumar Patel, 42, most recently residing in Willowbrook, Illinois; Sunny Joshi, 47, of Sugar Land, Texas; Jagdishkumar Chaudhari, 39, of Montgomery, Alabama; and Rajesh Bhatt, 53, of Sugar Land, each pleaded guilty to one count of money laundering conspiracy. Raman Patel, 82, of Gilbert, Arizona; Praful Patel, 50, of Fort Myers, Florida; and Jerry Norris, 47, of Oakland, California, each pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit fraud and money laundering offenses. The pleas were entered before U.S. District Court Judge David Hittner of the Southern District of Texas between Sept. 22 and Nov. 13, except for Raman Patel's plea, which was entered before U.S. District Court Judge Michelle Burns in the District of Arizona on Nov. 6. Six of the men have been in federal custody since their arrests in October 2016 and will remain detained until their pending sentencing dates.

According to admissions made in connection with their pleas, Miteshkumar Patel, Raman Patel, Joshi, Jagdishkumar Chaudhari, Bhatt, Praful Patel, Norris and their co-conspirators perpetrated a complex scheme in which individuals from call centers located in Ahmedabad, India, impersonated officials from the IRS and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), and engaged in other telephone call scams, in a ruse designed to defraud victims located throughout the United States. Using information obtained from data brokers and other sources, call center operators targeted U.S. victims who were threatened with arrest, imprisonment, fines or deportation if they did not pay alleged monies owed to the government.

Victims who agreed to pay the scammers were instructed how to provide payment, including by purchasing general purpose reloadable (GPR) cards or wiring money. Upon payment, the call centers would

immediately turn to a network of “runners” based in the United States to liquidate and launder the fraudulently obtained funds.

Based on admissions in Miteshkumar Patel’s plea, beginning in or around 2013, Miteshkumar Patel managed a crew of a half dozen domestic runners involved in the criminal scheme, liquidating as much as approximately \$25 million in victim funds for conspirators from India-based call center and organizational co-defendant HGLOBAL. Patel communicated about the fraudulent scheme with various domestic and India-based co-defendants via email, text messaging and WhatsApp messaging. Miteshkumar Patel and his runners purchased reloadable GPR cards that were registered using the misappropriated personal identifying information (PII) of unsuspecting victims that were later used to receive victims’ funds, and used those reloadable cards containing victims’ funds to purchase money orders and then deposit those money orders into bank accounts, as directed, while keeping a portion of the scam proceeds as profit.

Miteshkumar Patel also trained the runners he managed on how to conduct the liquidation scheme, provided them with vehicles to conduct their activities in Illinois and throughout the country, and directed a co-defendant to open bank accounts and limited liability companies for use in the conspiracy. Miteshkumar Patel further admitted to using a gas station he owned in Racine, Wisconsin to liquidate victim funds, and possessing and using equipment at his Illinois apartment to make fraudulent identification documents used by co-defendant runners in his crew to receive wire transfers directly from scam victims and make bank deposits in furtherance of the conspiracy.

According to admissions in Raman Patel’s guilty plea, from in or around 2014, Patel served as a domestic runner in and around south-central Arizona, liquidating victim scam funds per the instructions of a co-defendant. Patel also served as a driver for two co-defendants in furtherance of their GPR liquidation and related activities and sent bank deposit receipts related to the processing of victim payments and fraud proceeds to an India-based co-defendant via email and document scan services offered at various retail stores.

Based on admissions in Joshi and Bhatt’s guilty pleas, beginning in or around 2012, Joshi and Bhatt worked together as runners in the Houston, Texas area along with a co-defendant. They admitted to extensively communicating via email and text with, and operating at the direction of, India-based conspirators from organizational co-defendant CALL MANTRA call center to liquidate up to approximately \$9.5 million in victim funds, including by purchasing GPR cards and using those cards, funded by co-conspirators with scam victim funds, to purchase money orders and deposit them in third party bank accounts, while keeping a percentage of the scam proceeds for themselves as profit. Joshi has also agreed to plead guilty to one count of naturalization fraud pursuant to a federal indictment obtained against him in the Eastern District of Louisiana, based on fraudulently obtaining his U.S. citizenship.

Jagdishkumar Chaudhari admitted in his plea that between April 2014 and June 2015, he worked as a member of a crew of runners operating in the Chicago area and elsewhere throughout the country, at the direction of Miteshkumar Patel and others. In exchange for monthly cash payments, Jagdishkumar Chaudhari admitted to driving to hundreds of retail stores to purchase GPR cards to be loaded with victim funds by co-conspirators in India, purchasing money orders with GPR cards that had been funded with victim proceeds, depositing money orders purchased using victim scam proceeds at various banks, and retrieving wire transfers sent by victims of the scheme. Jagdishkumar Chaudhari is an Indian national with no legal status in the United States, and has agreed to deportation after he serves his sentence as a condition of his guilty plea.

In his plea, Praful Patel admitted that between in or around June 2013 and December 2015, he was a domestic runner who liquidated funds in and around Fort Myers, Florida for conspirators from India-based call center and organizational co-defendant HGLOBAL. Praful Patel communicated extensively via

WhatsApp texts with his conspirators. For a percentage commission on transactions he conducted, Praful Patel admitted to purchasing reloadable GPR cards that were registered using the misappropriated PII of unsuspecting victims that were later used to receive victims' funds, using those reloadable GPR cards containing victims' funds to purchase money orders and depositing those money orders into bank accounts as directed, and using fake identity documents to receive wire transfers from victims.

According to Norris' guilty plea, beginning in or around January 2013 continuing through December 2014, he was a runner who worked with conspirators associated with India-based call center and organizational co-defendant HGLOBAL, and was responsible for the liquidation of victim scam funds in and around California. Norris admitted he communicated extensively via WhatsApp and email with India-based co-defendants including Sagar "Shaggy" Thakar, purchased GPR cards used in the scheme, sent lead lists to conspirators in India that were then used by callers located in the call centers to target potential victims in the telefraud scheme, received scam proceeds via wire transfers using fictitious names, and laundered scam proceeds from GPR cards via ATM withdrawals.

To date, Miteshkumar Patel, Raman Patel, Joshi, Jagdishkumar Chaudhari, Bhatt, Praful Patel, Norris, 49 other individuals and five India-based call centers have been charged for their roles in the fraud and money laundering scheme in an indictment returned by a federal grand jury in the Southern District of Texas on Oct. 19, 2016. Including the pleas announced today, a total of 24 defendants have pleaded guilty thus far in relation to this investigation. Defendants Bharatkumar Patel, Ashvinbhai Chaudhari, Harsh Patel, Nilam Parikh, Hardik Patel, Rajubhai Patel, Viraj Patel, Dilipkumar A. Patel, Fahad Ali, Bhavesh Patel, Asmitaben Patel, Montu Barot, Nilesh Pandya, Dipakkumar Patel, Nisarg Patel, Rajesh Kumar, and Dilipkumar Ramanlal Patel previously pleaded guilty on various dates between April and September 2017.

Miteshkumar Patel is scheduled to be sentenced on March 7, 2018.

The remaining defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

ICE – Homeland Security Investigations, DHS-OIG and TIGTA led the investigation of this case. Also providing significant support were: the Criminal Division's Office of International Affairs; Ft. Bend County, Texas, Sheriff's Office; police departments in Hoffman Estates and Naperville, Illinois, and Leonia, New Jersey; San Diego County District Attorney's Office Family Protection and Elder Abuse Unit; U.S. Secret Service; U.S. Small Business Administration, Office of Inspector General; IOC-2; INTERPOL Washington; USCIS; U.S. State Department's Diplomatic Security Service; and U.S. Attorneys' Offices in the Middle District of Alabama, Northern District of Alabama, District of Arizona, Central District of California, Northern District of California, District of Colorado, Northern District of Florida, Middle District of Florida, Northern District of Illinois, Northern District of Indiana, District of Nevada and District of New Jersey. The Federal Communications Commission's Enforcement Bureau also provided assistance in TIGTA's investigation.

Senior Trial Attorney Michael Sheckels and Trial Attorney Mona Sahaf of the Criminal Division's Human Rights and Special Prosecutions Section (HRSP), Trial Attorney Amanda Wick of the Criminal Division's Money Laundering and Asset Recovery Section, and Assistant U.S. Attorneys S. Mark McIntyre and Craig M. Feazel of the Southern District of Texas are prosecuting this case. HRSP's Ann Marie Ursini and Assistant U.S. Attorney Greg Kennedy of the Eastern District of Louisiana prosecuted the naturalization fraud case against Joshi.

A [Department of Justice website](#) has been established to provide information about the case to already identified and potential victims and the public. Anyone who believes they may be a victim of fraud or

identity theft in relation to this investigation or other telefraud scam phone calls may contact the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) via this [website](#).

Anyone who wants additional information about telefraud scams generally, or preventing identity theft or fraudulent use of their identity information, may obtain helpful information on the IRS tax scams [website](#), the FTC phone scam [website](#) and the FTC identity theft [website](#).

Component(s):

[Criminal Division](#)

[USAO - Texas, Southern](#)

Press Release Number:

17-1281

Updated November 13, 2017