

## JUSTICE NEWS

### Department of Justice

Office of Public Affairs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Indian National Pleads Guilty for Role in Multi-Million Dollar India-Based Call Center Scam Targeting U.S. Victims**

An Indian national pleaded guilty today to one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering for his role in liquidating and laundering victim payments generated through various telephone fraud and money laundering schemes via India-based call centers.

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, Executive Associate Director Peter T. Edge of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), 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.

Bharatkumar Patel, aka Bharat Patel, 43, an Indian national who had resided in Midlothian, Illinois, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Court Judge David Hittner of the Southern District of Texas. He also agreed to deportation following his sentence. Sentencing is currently set for July 7, 2017.

According to admissions made in connection with the plea, Patel and his co-conspirators perpetrated a complex scheme in which individuals from call centers located in Ahmedabad, India, impersonated officials from the IRS or U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services 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 stored value cards or wiring money, and upon payment, the call centers would immediately turn to a network of "runners" based in the U.S. to liquidate and launder the fraudulently-obtained funds.

According to his plea, beginning in or about July 2013, Patel worked as a member of a crew of runners operating in the Chicago area and elsewhere throughout the country. Patel admitted to purchasing reloadable cards or retrieving wire transfers and using the misappropriated personal identifying information of U.S. citizens. Patel also admitted to opening personal bank accounts in order to receive scam proceeds and payments from defrauded victims as well as creating limited liability companies in his name to further the conspiracy. According to his plea, Patel opened one bank account that received more than \$1.5 million in deposits over a one-year period and another bank account that received more than \$450,000 in deposits over a five-month period.

Patel was charged for his role in the fraud and money laundering scheme alongside 55 other individuals and five call centers in an indictment returned by a federal grand jury in the Southern District of Texas on Oct. 19, 2016. An indictment is merely an allegation and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

HSI, DHS-OIG and TIGTA led the investigation of this case. Also providing significant support was the 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/Elder Abuse Unit; U.S. Secret Service; U.S. Small Business Administration - Office of Inspector General; IOC-2; INTERPOL Washington; U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS); U.S. State Department's Diplomatic Security Service; and U.S. Attorney's Offices in 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, Trial Attorney Robert Stapleton 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 the case.

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 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](#).

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*Updated April 20, 2017*