

JUSTICE NEWS

Department of Justice

Office of Public Affairs

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Third Indian National Pleads Guilty for Role in Multimillion 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.

Harsh Patel, 28, an Indian national who most recently resided in Piscataway, New Jersey, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Court Judge David Hittner of the Southern District of Texas. Sentencing is set for Aug. 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 (USCIS) 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. 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, since around January 2015, Patel worked as a runner operating primarily in New Jersey, California and Illinois. At the direction of India-based co-conspirators, often via electronic WhatsApp text communications, Patel admitted to purchasing reloadable cards registered with misappropriated personal identifying information of U.S. citizens. Once victim scam proceeds were loaded onto those cards, Patel admitted that he liquidated the proceeds on the cards and transferred the funds into money orders for deposit into various bank accounts while keeping a percentage of the victim funds for himself. Patel also admitted to receiving fake identification documents from an India-based co-conspirator and other sources and using those documents to receive victim scam payments via wire transfers.

To date, Patel, 55 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. Patel is the third defendant thus far to plead guilty in this case. Co-defendants Bharatkumar Patel, aka Bharat Patel, 43, and Ashvinbhai Chaudhari, 28, pleaded guilty on April 13, 2017, and April 26, 2017, respectively.

The remaining 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 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/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 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](#)

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