

## JUSTICE NEWS

### Department of Justice

Office of Public Affairs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, July 19, 2017

### **Two More Defendants Plead Guilty in Multimillion Dollar India-Based Call Center Scam Targeting U.S. Victims**

An Indian national and a Texas man each pleaded guilty to conspiracy charges this week for their respective roles in liquidating and laundering victim payments generated through a massive telephone impersonation fraud and money laundering scheme perpetrated by 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.

Montu Barot, 30, an Indian national most recently residing in Glendale Heights, Illinois, and Nilesh Pandya, 54, of Stafford, Texas, each pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit fraud and money laundering offenses, in violation of Title 18, U.S. Code, Section 371. The pleas were entered before U.S. District Court Judge David Hittner of the Southern District of Texas. Barot agreed to deportation following his sentence. Sentencing dates are pending.

According to admissions made in connection with their respective pleas, Montu Barot, Nilesh Pandya, 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 U.S. 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 Barot's guilty plea, beginning in or around June 2012, Barot served as a runner and coordinated the liquidation of victim scam funds by other runners per the instructions of conspirators from both India-based call centers and within the United States. Barot communicated via phone, text and email in furtherance of the criminal scheme with both domestic and India-based associates, and he and his conspirators used reloadable cards containing funds derived from victims by scam callers to purchase money orders and deposit them into various bank accounts as directed, in return for cash payments or commissions. Barot also admitted to sending financial ledgers to his conspirators detailing the movement of scam victim funds.

Based on admissions in Nilesh Pandya's guilty plea, beginning in or around March 2014, Pandya served as a runner liquidating victim scam funds within the Southern District of Texas. At the direction of two of his co-defendants, Pandya used stored value cards that had been loaded with victim funds to buy money orders and then deposit them into various bank accounts.

To date, Montu Barot, Nilesh Pandya, 54 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 this week's pleas, a total of thirteen defendants have pleaded guilty thus far in this case. Co-defendants Bharatkumar Patel, Ashvinbhai Chaudhari, Harsh Patel, Nilam Parikh, Hardik Patel, Rajubhai Patel, Viraj Patel, Dilipkumar A. Patel, Fahad Ali, Bhavesh Patel and Asmitaben Patel previously pleaded guilty on various dates between April and July 2017.

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 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, 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 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](#).

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**Component(s):**  
[Criminal Division](#)  
[USAO - Texas, Southern](#)

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