

NEWS

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Convenience Store Owner Admits Aiding Attempt to Bribe a Consular Official

(More)

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CAMDEN – A Wall Township convenience store owner pleaded guilty today to aiding a business partner in an attempt to pay a bribe to a U.S. Department of State employee in exchange for a multiple entry visa for a citizen of India, U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Christie announced.

Jiguveshkumar G. Patel, 27, of Belmar, a.k.a. “Jay,” a naturalized U.S. citizen who was born in India, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Renée M. Bumb to a one-count Information, which charges Patel corruptly offered \$10,000 to a public official with the intent to influence an official act and to influence a public official to commit or aid in the committing of a fraud against the United States, in violation of the official’s lawful duty. Judge Bumb continued the defendant’s release on a \$50,000 secured bond pending sentencing, which is scheduled for Sept. 22.

Patel was arrested on July 25, 2007, on a criminal Complaint by Special Agents with the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Diplomatic Security at the defendant’s convenience store located in Wall Township.

At his plea hearing, Patel admitted that from September 2006 to January 2007, he aided his business partner, Bharat Patel, in an attempt to obtain a visa for his partner’s son, who’s a citizen of India and was unable to obtain a visa to travel to the United States.

Patel admitted that he became aware that the daughter of a patron worked for “Immigration.” Patel approached the patron and offered to pay the individual’s daughter for a visa to get his partner’s son out India and into the U.S., he admitted. Sometime after the conversation, Patel admitted that the customer gave him an email address for his daughter so that his daughter and Bharat Patel could communicate directly about the visa.

On Jan. 17, 2007, Patel drove Bharat Patel to a rest-stop on the Garden State Parkway. Once at the rest-stop, Patel admitted that he approached a car and handed the female passenger an envelope containing approximately \$10,000 and told her that the envelope represented “half of it,” meaning half the payment for a multiple entry visa for Bharat Patel’s son.

A multiple entry visa allows the holder to depart and re-enter the United States on multiple occasions without having to apply for a new visa on each occasion.

Currently, Bharat Patel has not been charged and his whereabouts are unknown.

The bribery charge carries a maximum statutory sentence of 15 years in prison and a fine of up to \$250,000.

In determining an actual sentence, Judge Bumb will consult the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges that take into account the severity and characteristics of the offense, the defendant's criminal history, if any, and other factors. The judge, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence. Parole has been abolished in the federal system. Defendants who are given custodial terms must serve nearly all that time.

Christie credited Special Agents of the U.S. State Department, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Christopher Paul, in the New York Field Office, Troopers with the N.J. State Police, under the direction of Colonel Joseph R. Fuentes, Superintendent, and Police Officers the Wall Township Police Department, under the direction of Chief David Morris, with the investigation leading to the criminal complaint.

The Government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Jason M. Richardson of the Criminal Division in Camden.

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Defense Attorney: William Cunningham, Esq. Dover Township