

# Largest Identity Theft Case In U.S. History: Amar Singh And Wife, Neha Punjani-Singh, Plead Guilty To Massive Fraud

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Amar Singh and wife, Neha Punjani-Singh, pleaded guilty last month to identity theft and enterprise corruption charges

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It has been called the largest and most sophisticated [identity theft](#) case ever seen in the U.S., according to Queens (N.Y.) District Attorney Richard Brown.

Amar Singh, 33, and wife Neha Punjani-Singh, 30, pleaded guilty last month to identity theft and enterprise corruption charges in a case involving their roles in a \$13 million scam. The two were part of a group of 111 people who were arrested last October for taking part in an operation that [netted the millions between July and September 2011](#).

[Court documents posted by Wired magazine cite Singh](#) as one of four bosses of the criminal enterprise. They would receive information about unknown people from various foreign countries, such as Russia and China, as well as via statewide suppliers — who would use a skimming device to swipe consumer credit card information at retail or food establishments — and illegal identification-gathering websites, according to the court documents.

Singh and his cohorts would then employ "shoppers" who were sent out on shopping sprees around the U.S. with counterfeit credit and I.D. cards manufactured using the stolen information. [Shoppers allegedly used the fraudulent cards](#) to stay at five-star hotels, rent high-end cars, and even a private jet.

[According to the New York Post](#), Singh was reprimanded in court by the judge, who told him: "You are a huge criminal. A rip-off artist extraordinary."

Singh, who faced up to 250 years in prison, was only sentenced to **5 1/3 to 10 2/3 years** in prison for the charges. His wife, Punjani-Singh, pleaded guilty to petty larceny and was dismissed with a conditional discharge sentence.

Earlier this year, [the FTC estimated that identity theft cost Americans](#) around \$1.52 billion in 2011.

Lawd! Have mercy!!!

## **Subject: Financial parasites: Nearly 100 Guyanese busted in the biggest credit card scam in the US (2 articles)**

DEBIT TO SOCIETY: A few of the hundred-plus alleged scammers involved in a massive fake-credit-card ring are led into Queens court.



ELLIS KAPLAN

Amar Singh was sentenced today after pleading guilty for his role in one of the largest ID theft and credit card scams in US history.

A cast of unsavory characters from Queens was busted for allegedly manufacturing thousands of bogus credit cards and using them on massive shopping sprees and luxury vacations.

The two-year investigation ended this week, as authorities smashed several fraud rings and arrested 110 people (most of them Guyanese) around the borough, according to court records and sources.

"They went everywhere — Apple stores, Macy's, Nordstrom's, anywhere you can possibly imagine," said a

law-enforcement source.

One of the rings was led by (Guyanese) Amar Singh, who was described in court papers as "overseeing the entire operation" — including an army of shoppers and fences to convert high-end goods to cash. Singh allegedly received blank credit cards and account numbers from his contacts and had a whole crew of henchmen to help cash in with the phony plastic.

To complete the ruse, the crew allegedly forged identity cards.

Sources said that Singh employed his girlfriend, Neaj Punjani Singh, 21, as his top lieutenant — and that she would receive the high-ticket items purchased with the fake cards and funnel the cash through her personal bank account.

"They all go shopping: You go here, you go there, you buy this, you buy that," the source said.

Both Singhs were held on \$1 million bail.

The Queens District Attorney's Office and the NYPD declined comment, citing a press conference planned for after the arrest.

Investigators had been watching the various rings for two years, according to sources.

One defendant, Carlos Plaza, 26, was using forged cards to jet down to Miami and Puerto Rico on a private jet, the sources said.

"They were partying. This was bought on stolen credit cards," a source said.

Plaza is charged with enterprise corruption, identity theft and grand larceny.

He allegedly manufactured credit cards in his Richmond Hill home and was held on US\$250,000 bail.

Investigators, who used extensive wiretaps, also came across other crimes during the probe, sources said.

Angel Quinones, a security guard with military experience, was charged with grand larceny for allegedly stealing more than \$850,000 worth of computer equipment from a Citigroup location. He was held on \$100,000 bail.

The parade of arrests had local bail bondsmen working overtime.

"This is a once-a-year kind of bust. These are the biggest enterprise-corruption cases we've seen," said Jason Fordin, vice president of Empire Bail Bonds, noting that the only roundups of this size had involved gambling.

The credit-card fraud defendants represent "the diversity of Queens," he said.



NYPD officers bring into court last Thursday alleged members of an elaborate identity theft scheme. More than 100 men and women were charged. Photo by Ellis Kaplan

## OVER 80 ARE IN HANDCUFFS

**Queens. D.A. Announces The Largest ID Theft Ring Bust In U.S. History**

***In what was described as the largest identity theft takedown in U.S. history, 111 individuals comprising five organized ID theft rings were charged last Friday, Oct. 7 with crimes costing people and businesses over \$13 million in losses over a 16- month period, Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown and Police Commissioner Raymond W. Kelly announced.***

Eighty-six of the defendants are in custody, while 25 are presently being sought by authorities.

In addition, nearly two dozen of the men charged in the ID theft ring have also been charged with participating in burglaries and robberies throughout Queens, including a bank robbery in Forest Hills, the theft of over \$95,000 worth of cargo from Kennedy Airport , and the theft of about \$850,000 worth of computer equipment in Long Island City .

“This is by far the largest—and certainly among the most sophisticated— identity theft/credit card fraud cases that law enforcement has come across,” said District Attorney Brown in a statement. “Credit card fraud and identity theft are two of the fastest growing crimes in the United States, afflicting millions of victims and costing billions of dollars in losses to consumers, businesses and financial institutions.

“Many of the defendants charged [last Friday] are accused of going on nationwide shopping sprees, staying at five-star hotels, renting luxury automobiles and private jets, and purchasing tens of thousands of dollars worth of high-end electronics and expensive handbags and jewelry with forged credit cards that contained the account information of unsuspecting consumers,” he added. “Even after the culprits are caught and prosecuted, their victims are still faced with the difficult task of having to repair their credit ratings and financial reputations. In some cases, that process can take years.”

District Attorney Brown said that over 90 of the defendants have been charged in five indictments charging 784 pattern acts with, among other crimes, enterprise corruption under New York State 's Organized Crime Control Act.

They are accused of being members and associates of organized criminal enterprises that operated in Queens and elsewhere and that, between May 2010 and September 2011, systematically schemed to defraud thousands of unsuspecting consumers and financial institutions including American Express, Visa, MasterCard and Discover Card.

According to the indictments, the defendants fraudulently obtained credit card account numbers through various means and then used the stolen info to manufacture forged credit and ID cards.

Once the counterfeit cards were created, according to the indictments, they were given to teams of “shoppers” who were sent out on expeditions in New York, Florida, Massachusetts, California and other areas of the U.S. to purchase high-end electronics and other merchandise— such as designer handbags, game consoles and jewelry—which had either been requested or which could easily be fenced and re-sold, typically over the Internet.

Some of the shoppers used the forged credit cards to stay at such five-star hotels as the Fontainebleau and The Royal Palm in Miami Beach and the Las Casitas Village, the high-end private villas of the El Conquistador in Puerto Rico, and to rent Lamborghinis and Porsches and, in one instance, a private jet to take them from New York to Florida.

### **The case**

The District Attorney said that the investigation—dubbed “Operation Swiper”—leading to the indictments began in October 2009, when the NYPD's Identity Theft Squad commenced a joint investigation with the District Attorney's Economic Crimes Bureau into an identity theft ring operating in South Ozone Park .

The investigation involved physical surveillance, intelligence gathering and court-authorized electronic eavesdropping on dozens of different telephones in which thousands of conversations were intercepted—many of which required translation from Russian, Mandarin and Arabic to English.

The indictments charge that Imran Khan, Ali Khweiss, Anthony Martin, Sanjay (a.k.a. Rocky) Deowsarran and Amar Singh were “bosses” of criminal enterprises and received the necessary raw material: lists of credit card account numbers and various blank credit cards. ‘The materials were alleged to have come from overseas—unknown individuals in such places as Russia, Libya, Lebanon and China—or from statewide suppliers, such as “skimmers” (individuals who worked in a restaurant or bar, retail store or financial institution and used a skimming device to swipe a consumer’s credit card information) or “Internet suppliers” (who obtained credit card accounts through illegal websites).

According to the indictments, the boss then allegedly sent the stolen account numbers to a “manufacturer” who re-encoded the information onto the magnetic strips of blank credit cards using a “reverse” skimming device. The manufacturer was also allegedly responsible for putting the written four security numbers on the front of a credit card and the seven security numbers on the back, as well as writing and embossing the account number on the credit card.

In some cases, it is alleged, the manufacturer also placed the artwork and logos from financial institutions on the blank cards. In other cases, the manufacturer also allegedly made forged government identification— such as a New York State driver’s license— to match the name that was on the forged credit card.

Once the forged credit cards were completed, according to the charges, the items were distributed to the criminal enterprise’s “shopping crews,” which consisted of “crew leaders” and “shoppers.” Crew leaders allegedly supplied the fraudulent items to the shoppers and oversaw their planned shopping expeditions throughout New York and the U.S.

Crew leaders would, at times, allegedly direct their shoppers to purchase requested electronic merchandise in a specific store or mall. Among the local malls targeted by the shoppers were Queens Center, the Westchester Mall, the Americana Mall in Manhasset, the Roosevelt Field Mall in Garden City, the Walt Whitman Mall in Huntington and the Smithtown Mall.

At times, the shoppers allegedly shipped out-of-state purchases back to New York via Federal Express and UPS and used the forged credit cards to purchase plane tickets.

According to the charges, aiding the shoppers were collusive store owners or employees who worked within a particular retail store where the shoppers were making their purchases or in a bank where they had access to cardholder information and could check the information for high value targets and/or steal credit card information from the available files.

Sometimes, it is alleged, a fraud ring would employ an “impersonator,” an individual who contacted financial institutions or retail stores and impersonated the true cardholder and made inquiries in order to check the viability of the credit. Also employed were “bust out crews,” individuals who used the skimmed information of another member of the criminal enterprise to make thousands of dollars in purchases.

For example, it is alleged that Nelson Feliciano, who owns a security firm, allowed others to make a counterfeit credit card using his business account information and to use that account to make \$50,000 in purchases before claiming that the charges were fraudulent and that he was a victim of identity theft.

According to the indictments, once a shopper purchased high-end merchandise with forged credit cards, the merchandise was turned over to the crew leader who, in turn, gave the merchandise to the boss of the operation. The boss would then allegedly contact a “fence” and sell them the merchandise at a discounted price. The fence, in turn, would then allegedly offer the merchandise for resale to the public.

As part of the investigation, court authorized search warrants were executed earlier this week at 15 locations throughout New York City and Long Island—including several “mills” where the fraudulent documents were generated.

Among the items allegedly recovered as a result of the search warrants were approximately \$650,000 in cash, seven handguns (two defaced), a box truck full of electronics, computers, shoes and watches, skimmers, card readers, embossers and various amounts of raw material, such as blank credit cards and fake identifications.

### **Robberies, burglaries and more**

Derrick Singh, Parisam Itwaru, Tahidul Parvez and two other unapprehended individuals are accused of stealing cargo containing drill bits and power tool accessories with an aggregate value of \$95,338 from Qantas Airways at Kennedy Airport in October 2010.

They have been variously charged with first-degree attempted grand larceny, second-degree grand larceny, second-degree criminal possession of a forged instrument and fourth-degree conspiracy,

Imran Khan, Travis Lootawan, Kendall McLean and an unapprehended individual are charged with conspiring to rob a branch of the Flushing Savings Bank on Continental Avenue in Forest Hills in July. It is alleged that police—alerted to the plan through intercepted telephone calls—placed a marked NYPD vehicle in front of the bank, causing them to abort their plan.

They have been charged with second degree attempted robbery and fourth-degree conspiracy.

Jonathan Ortiz, Wilfred Rodriguez, Travis Hassang, Angel Quinones and two other unapprehended individuals are charged with stealing approximately \$850,000 in computer equipment from the Citigroup building at One Court Square in Long Island City on Aug. 25. It is alleged that Quinones worked at the building as a security guard for Allied Barton Security Services, which was contracted to Citicorp, and that Oluwo was a former employee of Citicorp.

They have been charged with second degree grand larceny and second degree criminal possession of stolen property

In addition, Ortiz's mother, Maria Ortiz, is charged with second-degree hindering prosecution by logging into her son's Facebook account to create an alibi defense for him.

The investigation was conducted by Detectives Enrico Morriello, Edwin Romero and Dafeng Zeng of the NYPD's Identity Theft Squad under the supervision of Lt. Ruperto Aguilar and the command of Deputy Inspector Gregory T. Antonsen of the Organized Theft and Identity Theft Task Force, and the overall supervision of Deputy Chief Jeremiah Quinlan, commander of the Special Investigations Division, and Chief of Detectives Phil T. Pulaski.

Assistant District Attorneys Jonathan D. Scharf and Edward K. Suh, of the Economic Crimes Bureau, is prosecuting the case, with the assistance of paralegal Kathleen P. Feeney, under the supervision of Gregory C. Pavlides, bureau chief, and Christina Hanophy, deputy bureau chief, and the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Peter A. Crusco and Deputy Executive Assistant District Attorney Linda M. Cantoni.

It was noted that an indictment is merely an accusation and that a defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

## The Breakdown of The Five ID Theft Rings

**In the “Khan/Box” enterprise**, 35 defendants are charged in two indictments; all are in custody.

They are variously charged with enterprise corruption, first and second-degree identity theft, third- and fourth-degree grand larceny, second-degree criminal possession of a forged instrument, fourth- and third-degree attempted grand larceny petit larceny, fourth-degree criminal facilitation and fifth-degree conspiracy.

- *Alleged boss*: Imran Khan
- *Alleged co-boss*: Travis Lootawan
- *Alleged crew leaders*: Jonathan Ortiz, Wilfredo L. Rodriguez, Edward Solomon and James Morgan
- *Alleged card manufacturers*: Leroy Linton, Ali Khweiss and Myles Beepath
- *Alleged supplier of account numbers*: Carlos Plaza
- *Alleged supplier of blank credit cards*: Ali Khweiss
- *Alleged skimmers*: Vishnu S. Harilal , Lilian Mera, Vincent Mineo, Regan Solomon, Jessica Torres, Justin DeJesus and Nicholas Hines
- *Alleged crew members*: Alvin A. Lootawan, Nelson Feliciano and Mahendra A. Lootawan
- *Allegedly collusive bank employees*: Stacy Manbahaul, Steven A. Bahadur and Imran Ibrahim
- *Allegedly collusive attorney*: Susan Persaud
- *Alleged impersonator*: Samantha Ramgulam
- *Alleged shoppers*: Kendall Mc- Clean, Devin W. Quinones, Travis Hassang Anthony Martin, Jacklyn Gunn, Leidy Rodriguez and Christopher Dwhaj.
- *Alleged fences*: Fnu Gustawian and Benny Ahoo Adhoot

**In the “Ali” enterprise**, 13 of 17 defendants are in custody. They are variously charged with enterprise corruption, first- and second degree identity theft, third and fourth-degree grand larceny, second-degree criminal possession of a forged instrument, fourth-degree attempted grand larceny, petit larceny, fourth-degree criminal facilitation and fifth degree conspiracy.

- *Alleged boss*: Ali Khweiss
- *Alleged crew leaders*: Travis Lootawan, Jonathan Ortiz and Wilfredo Rodriguez
- *Alleged card manufacturer*: Leroy Linton
- *Alleged shoppers*: Ravindra Singh, Matthew Thompson, Sarah Genere, Leidy Rodriguez, Ziad Mohamed, Danielle Fernandez and Victoria Duran
- *Alleged fence*: Kah Sheng Poh

**In the “Anthony Martin” enterprise**, eight of nine defendants are in custody.

They are variously charged with enterprise corruption, first and second-degree identity theft, third- and fourth-degree grand larceny, second-degree criminal possession of a forged instrument, fourth-degree attempted grand larceny, petit larceny, fourth-degree criminal facilitation and fifth-degree conspiracy.

- *Alleged boss/crew leader*: Anthony Martin
- *Alleged supplier of account numbers*: Carlos Plaza
- *Alleged manufacturers*: Ali Khweiss and Leroy Linto
- *Alleged shoppers*: Michael Severino, Robert Martin and Danielle Fernandez
- *Alleged fence*: Kah Sheng Poh

**In the “Rocky” enterprise,** 13 of 23 defendants are in custody.

The defendants are variously charged with enterprise corruption, first- and second-degree identity theft, third- and fourth-degree grand larceny, second-degree criminal possession of a forged instrument, fourth-degree attempted grand larceny petit larceny and fifth-degree conspiracy.

- *Alleged boss:* Sanjay Deowsarran *Alleged underboss:* Irina Pervukhina
- *Alleged crew leaders:* Svetlana Turakaeva, Romel Mangel, Sayeed Mohammed and Maria Hernandez
- *Alleged shoppers:* Dallas Chester, Julia Fair, Sayeed Mohammed, Alexey Vaselevith Koltyga, Reginald McMillian and Tina Mahabir
- *Alleged fence:* Allen Lam

**Finally, in the “Amar” enterprise,** 21 of 29 defendants are in custody, variously charged with enterprise corruption first-, second and third-degree identity theft, third- and fourth-degree grand larceny, second-degree criminal possession of a forged instrument, fourth-degree attempted grand larceny, petit larceny and fifth-degree conspiracy.

- *Alleged boss:* Amar Singh
- *Alleged personal assistant:* Neha Punjabi-Singh
- *Alleged crew leaders:* Sayeed Mohammed, Randolph Ramroop, Terrance Singh, Ravi Ramroop, Pedro Manuel Guzman-Cuevas, Syson Laguerre and Kamal Sanasi
- *Alleged shoppers:* Ahmar Lacorte, Margaret Mortel, Faried Mohamed, Sunil Ramroop, Kamal Sanasie, Michael Doodnarine, Darren Percival, Andre Shewtjon, Ericka Kidd, Sheena Franklyn, Kesho Baboolal and Angelika Wronowska
- *Alleged fence:* Allen Lam

**Other crimes**

Franciso Gonzalez has also been charged with third-degree robbery, while John Betancourt, Francisco Gonzalez, Devon Singh, Ali Khweiss and Reginald Nandallal have been charged with second-degree criminal possession of a forged instrument, third and fourth-degree grand larceny, fourth-degree attempted grand larceny, first-degree identity theft and petit larceny.

Carlos Plaza, Angelika Wronowska and Eury Rodriguez have been charged with second degree criminal possession of a forged instrument, third- and fourth-degree grand larceny, third and fourth-degree criminal possession of stolen property and first- and second-degree identity theft.