



*United States Attorney  
Southern District of New York*

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**TEXAS BUSINESSMAN FOUND GUILTY IN MANHATTAN FEDERAL  
COURT OF LAUNDERING MILLIONS OF DOLLARS FOR A MEXICAN  
NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING ORGANIZATION**

PREET BHARARA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced that VIKRAM DATTA, the owner of multiple retail perfume stores located on the United States-Mexico border, was found guilty yesterday of money laundering crimes related to the use of his perfume distribution business to launder millions of dollars for a Mexican narcotics organization. DATTA was arrested on January 15, 2011, after meeting in Manhattan with an undercover agent. He was convicted after a two-week jury trial presided over by U.S. District Judge LEWIS A. KAPLAN.

Manhattan U.S. Attorney PREET BHARARA stated: "As Vikram Datta has now discovered, there is a steep price to pay for those who allow their businesses to be used by narcotics traffickers to launder their drug money. We remain committed to working with our partners at the DEA to prosecute and punish those who think they can create a successful business model around money laundering."

According to the Indictment and the evidence presented during the two-week trial:

From June 2009 until January 2011, DATTA operated a business that sold significant amounts of perfume to Mexican purchasers. As payment, he accepted millions of dollars in cash that had been generated from drug sales in the United States. After the drugs were sold in the United States, the proceeds ("narco dollars") were smuggled to Mexico, where they were aggregated and stored. Mexican money exchange businesses then purchased the narco dollars in exchange for Mexican pesos at a steep discount from the prevailing inter-bank exchange rate. The exchange businesses later transported the narco dollars back into the United States and used them to purchase perfume at businesses, including DATTA's, located in Laredo, Texas, that would then ship the perfume to purchasers in Mexico.

DEA undercover agents were first introduced to DATTA in August 2010 and they continued to meet and speak with him on numerous occasions until January 2011. During these meetings, DATTA admitted, among other things, that he was receiving "a lot of cash" from his customers on the border and that "it's all Sinaloa money," an apparent reference to the Sinaloa Cartel, a major Mexican narcotics trafficking organization. DATTA also acknowledged that his business was "just washing the whole money." During the trial, Datta testified that he engaged in these activities as a result of "greed."

The DEA's analysis of financial records revealed that from January 2009 through January 2011 more than \$25 million in United States currency was deposited in bank accounts controlled by DATTA and his co-conspirators. The DEA also determined that DATTA frequently failed to file financial reports concerning cash transactions that are required by the Bank Secrecy Act, including Reports Of Cash Payments Over \$10,000 Received by a Trade or Business. These reports must be filed by any person who receives more than \$10,000 in a single transaction or a series of related transactions while conducting a trade or business.

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VIKRAM DATTA, 50, of Laredo, Texas, was convicted of two counts of money laundering conspiracy and one count of conspiracy to violate the travel act. He faces a maximum sentence of 45 years in prison and a maximum fine of \$1 million. DATTA is scheduled to be sentenced on January 20, 2012, by Judge KAPLAN.

The charges against DATTA were the culmination of an extensive undercover DEA investigation into the Colombian and Mexican Black Market Peso Exchange ("BMPE"), a means of laundering narcotics proceeds generated in the United States and ultimately returning them to Colombia and Mexico. In connection with the investigation into the BMPE, 29 individuals have been charged and 20 have been convicted to date.

Mr. BHARARA praised the investigative work of the DEA New Jersey Field Office, which led the investigation, and the DEA Houston and DEA Laredo field offices. He also thanked the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Office of Homeland Security Investigations and the IRS Criminal Investigations Division New Jersey Field Office for its assistance.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys PETER SKINNER, ALVIN BRAGG, HOWARD MASTER, MICHAEL FERRARA, and KAN MIN NAWADAY are in charge of the prosecution.