



The City of New York  
Department of Investigation

ROSE GILL HEARN  
COMMISSIONER

80 MAIDEN LANE  
NEW YORK, NY 10038  
212-825-5900

Release #65-2008  
[nyc.gov/html/doi](http://nyc.gov/html/doi)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
FRIDAY, JULY 11, 2008

DOI CONTACT: DIANE STRUZZI  
(212) 825-5931

**DOI STATEMENT ON 15 YEAR SENTENCE OF FORMER COMPUTER DIRECTOR AT THE CITY  
MEDICAL EXAMINER'S OFFICE FOR DEFRAUDING THE AGENCY OF MILLIONS IN SEPTEMBER 11<sup>TH</sup> FUNDS**

NATARAJAN "RAJU" VENKATARAM, the former Director of Management Information Systems ("MIS") at the City Office of the Chief Medical Examiner ("OCME"), was sentenced today in U.S. District Court in Manhattan to 15 years in prison for the theft of more than \$9 million dollars. Much of the money was taken from federal funds meant for the creation of a computer system to track and identify forensic evidence and identify victims of the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks at the World Trade Center. VENKATARAM was also fined \$50,000 and ordered to pay \$2.9 million in restitution and forfeiture. DOI investigators successfully traced financial transactions to India, which so far has resulted in the City's recovering \$6.12 million that was embezzled in the scheme.

DOI Commissioner Rose Gill Hearn said, "I am delighted with the strong message that this sentence sends and thank Michael J. Garcia, United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and his staff, and all the DOI investigators who worked so hard on this complicated case. Shameless greed fueled this crime. The defendant took advantage of a national tragedy by stealing funds intended to help identify victims of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. That this individual exploited and betrayed his authority at the Medical Examiner's Office makes this illegal behavior all the more appalling. DOI investigators worked tirelessly to decipher the complex scheme, including tracing millions of dollars to as far as India. This investigation and prosecution should serve as a caution to any City employee who wants to steal public money – he or she will be caught and will face serious consequences."

VENKATARAM's sentencing caps an extensive and far-reaching investigation by the New York City Department of Investigation ("DOI") into the financial schemes devised by VENKATARAM and his accomplice, ROSA ABREU, who was OCME's Director of Records. Both VENKATARAM and ABREU, resigned from OCME in September 2005, were arrested in December 2005 and pleaded guilty in October 2007. VENKATARAM pleaded guilty to one count of Conspiracy, one count of Embezzlement and 14 counts of Money Laundering. ABREU pleaded guilty to one count of Conspiracy, one count of Embezzlement and three counts of Money Laundering.

DOI began the investigation in 2004 after it was alerted to suspicions about VENKATARAM's procurement practices at OCME. DOI investigators found that VENKATARAM and ABREU steered numerous OCME computer contracts to several companies that performed little or no work for OCME. These companies, in turn, either forwarded the funds fraudulently obtained from OCME to three shell companies created by VENKATARAM and ABREU or laundered the funds through a dozen other

companies and/or individuals at VENKATARAM's direction. The funds that VENKATARAM and ABREU received came from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the City. VENKATARAM and ABREU were charged with submitting invoices for goods and services that were never provided and with padding invoices for computer services and software purchases following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

Commissioner Gill Hearn thanks the office of Michael J. Garcia, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and Assistant U.S. Attorneys Andrew Dember and Arlo Devlin-Brown of that office, for the successful prosecution of this matter.

The investigation was conducted by DOI's Inspector General for the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene Christopher Staackmann, Deputy Inspector General Stephan Zander, Counsel to the Inspector General Andrea Hecht, Assistant Inspector General Bradley Howard, Special Investigators Byron Biggerstaff and John Eleftheriades, Confidential Investigator Danielle Caruso, Associate Commissioner Yuval Hibshoosh, Investigative Auditors Laila Jane Yu, Helen Gromadsky, Lana Wong and Maggie Xu.

*DOI is one of the oldest law-enforcement agencies in the country. The agency investigates and refers for prosecution City employees and contractors engaged in corrupt or fraudulent activities or unethical conduct. Investigations may involve any agency, officer, elected official or employee of the City, as well as those who do business with or receive benefits from the City.*

**Get the worms out of the Big Apple.  
To report someone ripping off the City, call DOI at (212) 825-5959.**