



The City of New York
Department of Investigation

ROSE GILL HEARN
COMMISSIONER

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

Release 83-2005
nyc.gov/doi

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2005

CONTACT: EMILY GEST
(212) 825-5931

TWO CITY EMPLOYEES ARRESTED FOR BILKING GOVERNMENT OF MILLIONS IN 9/11 FINANCIAL AID

ROSE GILL HEARN, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Investigation (DOI), announced the arrest of NATARJAN R. VENKATARAM, a/k/a Raju, and ROSA ABREU for embezzling, stealing, or obtaining by fraud millions of dollars that had been provided to the New York City Office of Chief Medical Examiner (OCME), mostly by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), by submitting invoices for goods and services that were never provided or by padding invoices for computer services and software purchased following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

After receiving some information from the OCME in October 2004, DOI initiated an investigation that led to the charges Wednesday in Manhattan Federal Court. VENKATARAM, 41, of Queens, the former Director of OCME's MIS department, and ABREU, 38, also of Queens, an assistant to VENKATARAM, have been charged with *Theft from a program receiving federal funds*. If convicted, they each face up to 10 years in prison.

DOI Commissioner Rose Gill Hearn said, "By inflating the costs of computer services and software, these defendants set up a criminal scheme in order to line their own pockets. And, after the tragedy of September 11, their greed was unbridled. Contracts were deliberately inflated so that they could siphon more money from the government, and, in turn, taxpayers. These defendants breached their positions of trust and responsibility and took advantage of a national tragedy. The alleged misconduct mars the Herculean efforts of all the other honest OCME employees who worked tirelessly around the clock to serve the people of New York. DOI will make every effort to recover funds lost to this scheme. The defendants deliberately fashioned a scheme that would be difficult to uncover and unravel. DOI investigators pored through scores of documents, conducted multiple surveillances, and conducted dozens of interviews. This investigation is ongoing."

Commissioner Gill Hearn added, "The Department of Information Technology & Telecommunications (DOITT) has been working closely with OCME to ensure a smooth continuity of its computer system. The charges in this Complaint were brought against two of OCME's 700-plus employees, both of whom worked in the administrative area where, the Complaint charges, they perpetrated this scheme. The medical and scientific services provided by OCME are renowned as among the best in the country. At DOI's recommendation, the OCME suspended both defendants, who subsequently resigned."

As fully detailed in the complaint, these defendants orchestrated the over-billing or billing for services that were not provided in order to siphon off profits to a maze of companies that had ties to the defendants. Also described in the complaint, the defendants deliberately devised schemes in an effort to throw DOI investigators off the trail.

This case was investigated by DOI's Chief of Staff Robert F. Roach, as well as DOI's Inspector General for OCME, Sam Amorese and members of his staff. This case will be prosecuted by the office of Michael J. Garcia, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York. Assistant United States Attorneys Deborah Landis and Arlo Devlin-Brown will handle the matter. DOI thanks the U.S. Attorney's Office for its assistance.

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