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CRZ scam: SIT finds 63 more forged land records; 165 so far

'Forged Maps Facilitated Construction Of 267 Properties'

Swati Deshpande & S Ahmed Ali | TNN

TOI/Photo for representation

Investigators suspect that officials from Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), Land Records Department, and City Survey Office played a pivotal role in manipulating maps

Mumbai: The SIT probing manipulation of documents for plots in ecologically sensitive Coastal Regulation Zones (CRZ) and no development zones (NDZ) in Mumbai has found 63 more forged records. With this, the total number of forged land record maps have touched 165. The tampering, which facilitated unauthorized construction on hundreds of properties along the suburban coastline, involves a nexus of govt officials, contractors, and estate agents, according to the SIT. It also found that 205 RTI applications were filed to create an illusion of legitimacy around the altered records.

The SIT, formed under the direction of Bombay HC, has so far arrested five individuals, including two retired officials from the Land Records Department and a contractor, Narshim Puttawallu, who has emerged as a central figure in the scam, having been named in four FIRs. Investigators suspect that officials from Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), Land Records Department, and City Survey Office played a pivotal role in manipulating maps.

TOI has learnt that the SIT found that the forged maps facilitated illegal construction on 267 properties, with permissions issued in 32 cases under the BMC Act. Many permissions were granted by the Slum Rehabilitation Authority (SRA) and MHADA based on falsified documents.

Investigators revealed that the syndicate used forged maps to modify land classifications during 2012-2020, allowing construction in areas marked as CRZ or NDZ. The scam was allegedly orchestrated by altering entries in official City Survey maps and leveraging fabricated records to show pre-1964 structures, which are protected under CRZ regulations.

Fifteen landowners were questioned during the probe, with four admitting to seeking Puttawallu's assistance in altering their properties' classification.

The scam came to light after a farmer from Erangal, Malad, Vaibhav Thakur, reported illegal construction on his ancestral agricultural land in 2016. His own inquiries revealed that his plot and adjacent areas, originally marked as part of CRZ, had been reclassified. Thakur filed complaints with the BMC and Malad Police, leading to an FIR in 2021. However, no substantial progress was made until Thakur approached the Bombay High Court, which directed the formation of a crime branch SIT in October 2024 under Joint Commissioner of Police (Crime) Lakhmi Gautam.

The SIT has identified 18 officials, including retired employees from the BMC, City Survey Office, and Land Records Department, for questioning. Some officials initially avoided participating in the investigation by citing election duty, but are being summoned again. Two police officers from the Kherwadi and Goregaon police stations are also facing a departmental inquiry for their failure to act earlier on the FIRs. Architects have been roped in to scrutinize the maps, while the SIT is also examining the roles of RTI applicants to trace the extent of the conspiracy.

Techie, wife poison 2 kids to death, end lives in B'luru

Times News Network

Bengaluru: A 38-year-old software consultant and his wife died by suicide after killing their two children in Bengaluru on Sunday night. Financial burden and emotional stress are said to have forced the couple to take the extreme step. Preliminary investigation suggested Anup Kumar and Rakhi (35) poisoned their five-year-old autistic daughter Anupriya and two-year-old son Priyansh, before hanging themselves. The family was from Prayagraj in Uttar Pradesh, and was staying in a rented house.

On Monday, when a woman employed by the couple to take care of the kids came for work, she discovered Anup hanging and raised an alarm. Neighbours rushed in and found the others dead in another room. The woman, Reshma, told police she was asked to come a little early as the family had planned to leave for Puducherry. Police checked Kumar's laptop and phone and found that he had sent an email to his brother Amit.

Based on the contents of the mail, police said Anup's financial troubles began after his uncle Rakesh lured him into investing around Rs 25 lakh on a piece of land in Prayagraj to start a petrol bunk in 2018. The business remained a non-starter. After Anupriya was admitted to a pre-school, the couple got their daughter's medical examination done on teachers' insistence. The results suggested she was autistic. Most of Anup's salary was spent on daughter's treatment. The financial strain took a toll on his mental health.

After TN, Kolkata police close cases against Martin

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New Delhi: After Tamil Nadu police's withdrawal of an FIR against lottery king **Santiago Martin** in an alleged corruption case, now Enforcement Directorate has hit a new hurdle with Kolkata police filing a closure report in two FIRs against Martin and his company citing "want of evidence". In the absence of a predicate offence (police FIR in corruption case), ED's PMLA probe may be closed as it had happened in Tamil Nadu. The probe in Tamil Nadu resumed only after the agency moved Madras HC, which, in a judgment in Oct last year, asked the state police to restore the FIR as there was enough evidence of corruption against Martin and his company Future Gaming & Hotel Services.

In the closure of two FIRs in Kolkata, sources said ED has moved the chief judicial magistrate's court in Alipore and the court of additional CJM in Sealdah on the ground that the police have filed a closure report without completing the probe.

"Complete investigation was not done by Kolkata police and the information shared by ED under Section 66(2) of PMLA was also not adhered to," the agency said in its applications and urged the courts to quash the police's closure report. The agency has already attached assets worth Rs 1,000 crore in the case. ED has claimed that it has "shared information and evidence of fraud and money laundering with Kolkata police but they have not taken any action".

During its investigation, the Kolkata unit of ED had attached alleged "proceeds of crime" worth Rs 409 crore linked to Martin and his company. Later, in Sept 2023, the agency filed a chargesheet against him in the special PMLA court in Kolkata. The Kerala unit of ED had separately attached assets of over Rs 622 crore.

ED's probe has found properties linked to Martin in Coimbatore, Chennai, Mumbai, Dubai and London, besides investments in share markets. Martin's Future Gaming & Hotel Services was the single largest contributor to political parties with Rs 1,368 crore donated through electoral bonds between 2019 and 2024.

Of the Rs 1,592 crore received by TMC through bonds, Rs 542 crore came from Future Gaming. The lottery king contributed Rs 503 crore to DMK, out of the party's total bond income of Rs 632 crore. BJP (Rs 100 crore), YSRCP (Rs 154 crore) and Congress (Rs 50 crore) were among the other beneficiaries.

SC: Freedom of speech inside House given a wide latitude

▸Continued from Page 1

Sunil Kumar Singh's counsel A M Singhvi said even though the matter is sub judice, EC has announced a by-poll for Singh's seat which has fallen vacant, and apprehending this would create confusion. Singhvi said if elections are held and someone else gets elected, and at the same time SC sets aside Singh's expulsion, it would give rise to an incongruent situation of having two elected candidates for the same seat. SC should stay the elections scheduled this month, he pleaded.

SC refused to postpone the elections, but said it would schedule the final hearing of Singh's writ petition on Jan 9. Singhvi said, "Freedom of speech inside a House has been given wide latitude." The bench said, "This is how freedom of speech is used inside the House? You (Singhvi) are also an MP. Do you subscribe to the use of such language inside a House?" Singhvi said he does not subscribe to such language, but expulsion for use of such language would make the opposition benches empty. "For a similar use of language by another MLC, he was suspended. But in the case of Singh, it was expulsion."

The Ethics Committee of the legislative council in its report had recommended removal of Singh, stating that "being the chief whip of opposition, his legislative responsibility of rules should be more than others. But his behaviour was otherwise."

Hockey player alleges rape at selection camp, coach arrested

MS Nawaz

Haridwar: A state-level hockey coach from Uttarakhand was arrested in Haridwar on Sunday for allegedly raping a 16-year-old player during a selection camp of the state team for the upcoming 38th National Games in Dehradun.

Police said on Monday that the accused, Bhanu Prakash, 37, was the assistant coach of the senior men's team. Soon after allegations made, state govt terminated the coach's contract and asked officials to take back all the certificates provided to him by authorities.

State sports minister Rekha Arya said, "We're standing with the survivor. A letter was sent to Sports Authority of India to suspend the accused's coaching certificate and a public notice was issued to not appoint him as coach elsewhere."

After the complaint from the player's parents, police registered a case against the man under Section 64 (2) (rape) of BNS and Section 5 of Pocso Act.

'Data shows no unusual surge in flu-like illness cases in India'

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The second case of HMPV, detected on Jan 3, involves an eight-month-old boy admitted for fever following an injury. He tested positive for both HMPV and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and is currently recovering. Both children have a history of bronchopneumonia and neither has travelled abroad, suggesting they contracted the infection locally.

A two-month-old from Dungarpur in Rajasthan was admitted to a private hospital in Ahmedabad on Dec 24 with respiratory illness and diagnosed with HMPV on Dec 26. Dr Bhavin Solanki of AMC said the hospital reported the case late, and the patient was isolated. Two children, aged seven and 13, tested positive at Meditrina Institute of Medical Sciences in Nagpur. They were initially treated for suspected H1N1 (swine flu) with Tamiflu, but PCR tests confirmed HMPV on Jan 3. The kids recovered through outpatient treatment.

TIMES VIEW: Experts have pointed out that this particular virus has been present in the country since 2001, and there's no reason for alarm. However, normal precautions must be taken. Also, govts, both Union and state, should carry out awareness campaigns to allay any collective anxiety in a Covid-scarred world.

Tamil Nadu health secretary Supriya Sahu said the state has two active cases — in Chennai and Salem — and the condition of both is stable. "HMPV infections are self-limiting and resolve with symptomatic care, including adequate hydration and rest," she said.

Health minister Nadda said HMPV spreads through respiratory droplets and can affect all age groups. "The virus spreads more during winter and early spring months," he said. "Our health systems and surveillance networks remain vigilant, ensuring the country is ready to respond promptly to any emerging health challenges. There is no reason to worry. We are closely monitoring the situation," he assured.

ICMR chair for disease elimination, Dr Rajni Kant, said HMPV is a known cause of respiratory illness in children and confirmed its presence in different parts of India. "ICMR-Regional Medical Research Centre, Gorakhpur, tested respiratory pathogens in 100 under-five patients... at BRD Medical College in 2022. Out of 100 enrolled paediatric patients, four (4%) were found HMPV positive," Kant said.

Karnataka health minister Dinesh Gundu Rao said the virus is likely a local strain unrelated to the outbreak in China. "Referring to any recent case as the 'first' is misleading. I don't think we should be pressing the panic button." Current data from ICMR and Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP) confirmed no unusual surge in influenza-like illness cases in the country.

(Inputs from Sarfaraz Ahmed in Nagpur, Sumati Yengkhom in Kolkata)

Kerala nurse a Houthi captive, no Yemen prez nod for death sentence

Times News Network

Kochi: Yemeni embassy in India said Monday that its president Rashad Mohammed Al-Alimi has not ratified the death sentence of **Nimisha Priya**, saying nurse from Kerala convicted of murdering a Yemeni citizen is "currently detained in Sana'a, under authority of Houthi militia".

An embassy statement said "the entire case has been handled by Houthi militia, and therefore Rashad Al-Alimi, chairman of the Presidential Leadership Council, Republic of Yemen, has not ratified the judgment".

Nimisha from Palakkad district was convicted in 2018 of murdering Yemeni citizen Talal Mahdi in 2017. She has since been in Yemen's prison.

Unverified media reports suggested that the approval for the death sentence came from Mehdi Al-Mashat, the rebel president and leader of Houthi Supreme Political Council.

Save Nimisha Priya International Action Council called for the immediate intervention of India's external ministry. Nimisha's lawyer Subhash Chandran said the council is willing to pay any amount as "blood money" but "the govt should take the initiative".

Gypsies corner tigers in reserve, HC steps in

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Nagpur: Bombay high court on Monday took suo motu cognizance of tourists cornering a tigress and her five cubs in Umred-Pauni-Karhandla Wildlife Sanctuary near Gothangaon Gate, ordering principal chief conservator of forests (PCCF) to submit a detailed affidavit by Wednesday, outlining actions taken and preventive measures.

In the viral videos of the Dec 31 incident, safari vehicles are seen crowding around the tigress, identified as F-2, and her cubs from both sides of the road in the buffer zone to help the tourists capture photos and videos. Trapped and agitated, the tigress displayed signs of aggression as she attempted to retreat.

The videos drew sharp criticism from wildlife enthusiasts and conservationists.

Nagpur bench comprising justices Nitin Sambre and Vrushali Joshi reprimanded forest officials for failing to monitor violations inside the sanctuary and relying solely on social media to detect incidents. They demanded a robust mechanism to prevent such lapses and ensure better enforcement of wildlife protection laws. The sanctuary's field director informed HC that action was taken against some guides and drivers.

Forest officials filed an FIR against offenders under Wildlife Protection Act, which mandates jail up to three years or fines up to Rs25,000. The court hinted at stricter enforcement and penalties to act as deterrents against future violations.

The guides and drivers failed to follow established protocols, which mandate maintaining a safe distance and avoiding any disturbance to wildlife, forest officials said.

Cops' booze party in K'taka sanctuary sparks row

A booze party inside a reserve forest in Karnataka's Belagavi by a group of policemen has sparked a row. A video of the party was uploaded on social media by the cops. It shows 12-15 policemen entering the forest sans permission, lighting a fire and cooking food. They had a booze party, roamed in the forest and swam near a waterfall. A forest official confirmed that the cops illegally entered the reserve forest. "Penal action will be initiated," he said. However, the DCF denied the claims that the cops entered Bhimgad Wildlife Sanctuary, a protected forest where the entry of outsiders is prohibited. In the video, the cops have claimed it was the Bhimgad sanctuary. Despite the video, district SP Bhimashankar Guled said: "It's true that they visited the reserve forest. However, they did not conduct a booze party or cook food in the reserve area, but outside." TNN

15 trapped in Assam coal mine flooding, Army's help sought

Guwahati: Around 15 labourers were feared trapped inside a coal mine in Assam's Dima Hasao district after a sudden gush of water flooded the site on Monday morning. The accident occurred around 7am at Assam Coal Quarry, situated in Umrangso's 3 Kilo area in the district. According to locals, about 10-15 workers were inside the quarry when the mishap occurred but authorities were yet to confirm a number.

Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma said the state has requested the Army's assistance in the ongoing rescue operation. "SDRF and NDRF are also on their way to the incident site to aid in the efforts," he posted on X. "...The exact number and status are yet unknown. The DC, SP and my colleague Kaushik Rai are rushing to the site," CM Sarma said. TNN

Sextortion racket busted in Diu

A sextortion racket running at a hotel under the guise of spa services was busted Monday in Diu, a favourite watering hole for Gujarat that attracts thousands of tourists. Police arrested three people, including a 20-year-old woman, and seized hidden cameras and videos from them. TNN

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