

Dark Web Vendor Pleads Guilty to Distributing Narcotics and Forfeits \$150M

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An Indian national pleaded guilty today to selling controlled substances on dark web marketplaces and agreed to forfeit \$150 million.

According to court documents, Banmeet Singh, 40, of Haldwani, India, created vendor marketing sites on dark web marketplaces, such as Silk Road, Alpha Bay, Hansa, and others, to sell controlled substances, including fentanyl, LSD, ecstasy, Xanax, Ketamine, and Tramadol. Customers ordered controlled substances from Singh using the vendor sites and by paying with cryptocurrency. Singh then personally shipped or arranged the shipment of controlled substances from Europe to the United States through U.S. mail or other shipping services.

“Banmeet Singh and traffickers like him think they can operate anonymously on the dark web and evade prosecution,” said Acting Assistant Attorney General Nicole M. Argentieri of the Justice Department’s Criminal Division. “Today’s guilty plea, which includes forfeiture of approximately \$150 million in cryptocurrency, demonstrates that the Justice Department will hold criminals who violate U.S. law accountable no matter how they conceal their activity. Together with our international partners, we will continue to find criminals lurking in the darkness and bring their crimes to light.”

“In the Singh organization’s drug orders, the members frequently used the vendor name ‘Liston’ and signed off with the signature phrase, ‘I’m still dancing,’” said U.S. Attorney Kenneth L. Parker for the Southern District of Ohio. “Today, with Banmeet Singh’s plea of guilty, the dance is over.”

From at least mid-2012 through July 2017, Singh controlled at least eight distribution cells within the United States including cells located in Ohio, Florida, North Carolina, Maryland, New

York, North Dakota, and Washington, among other locations. Individuals in those distribution cells received drug shipments from overseas and then re-packaged and re-shipped the drugs to locations in all 50 states, Canada, England, Ireland, Jamaica, Scotland, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

“Banmeet Singh operated a global dark web enterprise to send fentanyl and other deadly and dangerous drugs to communities across America — in all 50 states — as well as Canada, Europe, and the Caribbean,” said Administrator Anne Milgram of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). “DEA is proud to have worked with its law enforcement partners in the United States and the United Kingdom to dismantle this enterprise, protect the American people, and bring Singh to justice.”

“The guilty plea serves as a reminder that IRS:CI special agents will uncover illegal activity here and abroad, pierce the perceived veil of anonymity provided by cryptocurrencies, and bring those responsible for laundering drug proceeds to justice,” said Special Agent in Charge Bryant Jackson of the IRS Criminal Investigation (IRS:CI) Cincinnati Field Office. “IRS will continue to push the agency to the forefront of complex cyber and money laundering investigations and work collaboratively with our law enforcement partners to protect the American public.”

Over the course of the conspiracy, the Singh drug organization moved hundreds of kilograms of controlled substances throughout the United States and established a multimillion-dollar drug enterprise which laundered millions of dollars of drug proceeds into cryptocurrency accounts, which ultimately became worth approximately \$150 million.

In April 2019, Singh was arrested in London, and the United States secured his extradition in 2023.

“Dismantling online marketplaces that seek to poison our communities is a top priority for Homeland Security Investigations,” said Acting Special Agent in Charge Shawn Gibson of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Detroit. “Capitalizing on our international footprint and our law enforcement partnerships, we will do everything we can to safeguard Ohio communities against drug traffickers. Today’s guilty plea is the culmination of years of hard work across multiple jurisdictions both here in the United States and internationally.”

“The U.S. Postal Inspection Service is committed to keeping employees and customers of the U.S. Postal Service safe from dangerous substances in the mail,” said Postal Inspector in Charge Lesley Allison of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service (USPIS). “Furthermore, we will continue to take all necessary actions to combat and remove dangerous and illicit drugs from the mail stream and the dark web. The charges against this individual proves the resolve of postal inspectors and our law enforcement partners to pursue these organizations with every resource at our disposal, and to ultimately see that justice is served.”

Singh pleaded guilty to conspiracy to possess with the intent to distribute controlled substances and conspiracy to commit money laundering. He faces an agreed upon sentence of eight years in prison. A sentencing date has not yet been set. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

DEA, IRS:CI, HSI, USPIIS, and Upper Arlington and Columbus, Ohio Police Departments are investigating the case. The United Kingdom's National Crime Agency (NCA), Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), and U.K. Central Authority (UKCA) provided significant assistance.

The Justice Department's Office of International Affairs provided significant assistance in securing the arrest and extradition of Singh from the United Kingdom.

Trial Attorney Emily Cohen of the Criminal Division's Money Laundering and Asset Recovery Section and Assistant U.S. Attorney Michael J. Hunter for the Southern District of Ohio are prosecuting the case.

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