

Sanpada bank heist: To hide face, 3 thieves turned their backs to camera

TUNNEL ROBBERY Footage can't help establish identity, but cements theory that gang planned every aspect of robbery

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MUMBAI: A CCTV camera has recorded three suspects, believed to have coordinated the sensational robbery at a bank in Sanpada, which came to light on Monday. Footage from the camera, installed outside the bank, features the men leaving the grocery store two shops away around 7 am on Saturday.

Sources in the Navi Mumbai police said the discovery has cemented their theory that the heist was planned for Friday night as the bank would be shut for the next two days. "They planned it carefully so they had enough time to escape," sources said.

The footage, however, features the men with their backs turned to the camera, which makes it hard to establish their identities. "It seems that they knew the exact position of the camera and took care not to turn their faces even once," said sources.

Police also found jute bags with soil near Junagar railway station, 200m from the bank.

Officers said the soil was the same as that dug out to create the tunnel. "The condition of the bags indicates that they have been there since last monsoon. It is obvious that the crime was planned and executed over months," said an investigating officer.

Cops found that the Aadhaar card and other personal documents, which prime suspect Gena Bachchan Prasad submitted to the landlord while finalising the rent agreement, were fake. "The names on the cards seem to be tampered with. We suspect his photographs were superimposed on stolen identity documents," sources added.

Prasad's mobile phone was last traced to Nashik on Sunday. The landlord told police that Prasad paid him Rs25,000 a month in cash. This indicates that he wanted to conceal his identity as any wire or cheque transaction would have helped identify him, sources said.

Police said Prasad and the two shop attendants never led the landlord or their neighbours to suspect anything amiss. "They always paid the rent on time and kept to themselves," sources said.

The landlord said their behaviour was why he did not object to their proposal to renovate the store three months ago. "On the pretext of building a store room, the suspects brought several

FAKE PAN CARD, NO CCTV CAMERAS: HEIST MADE EASY

On Monday morning, bank officials spotted 30 broken lockers and a hole on the right side of the room

They discovered that thieves had dug a huge tunnel and used it to enter the room and flee with valuables from the lockers

On entering the tunnel, officials found that at its other end was a general store, three shops away

Gena Bachchan Prasad, who had rented the store in May, is currently missing

The police said he had submitted a fake PAN card and Aadhaar card while finalising the rent agreement

The bank had 225 lockers, of which the culprits broke into 30

While CCTV cameras have been installed in the bank's other rooms, there were none in the locker room to ensure customers' privacy

So far, police have taken the statements of 28 people who were collectively looted of cash and jewellery worth Rs2.85 crore

Police said the other two people are currently out of town. Their statements will be recorded once they return

The culprits stole 10,586g gold, 6,391g silver, Rs70,000 in cash and diamonds worth Rs50,000

The detection branches of 10 police stations have joined the investigation



The tunnel (inset) started at Shree Balaji general store and ended at the locker room of the Bank of Baroda's Sanpada branch (above), which is two shops and one ATM kiosk away.

'THIEVES MIGHT HAVE HIRED LOCKER'

Amid suspicion that the thieves had opened an account in the bank and hired a locker to ascertain the exact topography of the room, the police have started to verify each of the bank's 300 customers who had a locker there. Even if all the customers are found to be genuine, the involvement of an insider cannot be ruled out, said sources



HT PHOTO

sheets of plywood and created a partition extending up to the roof. They kept the door locked at all times," sources said. They added that two tiles behind the door were removed so the tunnel could be dug. Police found layers of plywood sheets covering the entry-point of the tunnel.

While police have not yet traced the gang, they suspect they could be from Jharkhand or Rajasthan. A police team allegedly reached Jharkhand on Wednesday.

"Specialised gangs from these states, who have expertise in such tunnel heists, usually use such a modus operandi," sources said. "We suspect that the accused were security guards who worked in the city, but were not locals," said Nitin Kasauddikar, assistant commissioner of police (crime).

The police are checking if some customers, who had lockers in the bank, or some employees were hand-in-glove with the culprits. "It is impossible for anyone to dig a tunnel and get into the locker room without any prior knowledge of the bank. No one, except for employees or customers, can enter this room" said an investigating officer.

Cops sensitise banks, 'Met tenant once, had no suspicions'

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NAVIMUMBAI: After 30 lockers in Bank of Baroda's Sanpada branch were looted, the Navi Mumbai police have launched a drive to sensitise residents, bank employees and jewellers about safety measures they should take to ensure the safety of their property.

The police have started meeting officials of different banks to understand their security systems. Rajendra Mane, deputy commissioner of police (zone II), said, "We had launched a drive to sensitise bank officials and jewellers around two years ago. Now, after this incident at Sanpada, we have relaunched the drive."

The cops have asked bank officials to install proper lighting around their offices and said professional security officials with licensed firearms are a must. Similarly, jewellers and housing societies have also been asked to

install CCTV cameras in and around their premises.

"If possible the banks should also install sirens on their premises. It will raise an alarm if someone tries to break in," said another police officer.

Safety of lockers and rooms used for keeping cash in banks is however, still a big question. Mane said, "The police cannot interfere in the internal security system of banks. Different banks may have different policies for that."

Sunil R Udupa, chairman and managing director, Securans Systems Pvt. Ltd, which is mainly into e-surveillance products, said, "For such high-risk areas, there should be hi-tech surveillance solutions. We strongly recommended seismic sensors and PIR solutions for such zones. The most crucial surveillance measure is the seismic sensor which can detect any security breach either by any minute audio, touch, vibration or hammering."

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NAVIMUMBAI: The main suspect in the Sanpada heist, Gena Bachchan Prasad, has been missing since the incident came to light. As Prasad had rented a shop at Bhakti Residency building, police are now trying to find out more about him by questioning Vashi resident Sharda Kathavle, who owns the shop.

Kathavle had rented out the shop to Prasad in May, following which the suspect started a grocery store.

"I met Prasad through a real estate agent. I met him just once while finalising the agreement. He did not appear suspicious. He gave me his PAN card and Aadhaar card and we also obtained a no objection certificate from the police during the agreement talks," Kathavle told HT.

Kathavle said Prasad would pay rent to an agent, who would



The prime accused, Gena Bachchan Prasad.

HT PHOTO

then hand it over to him. "I did not rent my shop out to him out of greed. I asked the previous tenant for the same amount. I had no idea what he was doing inside the shop," he said. In the agreement, Prasad said he lived at Ramia Khan Patel Chawl, Rajeev Nagar, Gajidhar Badh Road, Santa Cruz (West). Police said this is a fake address. Sources said Prasad paid Rs1 lakh as a security deposit Rs25,000 as monthly rent.

Kathavle said he was cooperating with the police.

Work on widening JVL Road extension to begin in Jan

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MUMBAI: By next year, a new and widened road will facilitate smooth traffic flow between Swami Vivekanand Road and Lokhandwala Complex. The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), which has been demolishing illegal structures on the Jogeshwari-Vikhroli Link Road (JVL) extension opposite Infiniti Mall in phases, said the road work on JVL extension is to start in January.

The K-West ward office razed four of 10 big commercial structures, including a showroom and a bar, on a part of this road on Wednesday. According to BMC



BMC conducts a demolition drive on Wednesday.

SHASHI S KASHYAP/HT

officials, the demolition work was delayed because of protesting plot owners.

Around 60 of total 550 structures have been demolished so far, said assistant municipal com-

missioner Prashant Gaikwad.

However, owners of commercial structures and a local corporator are unhappy with the ongoing demolition work. Three of the owners have got stay orders from court, said an official.

Corporator Rajul Patel said, "A 30-ft-wide space along the road has been reserved for project affected people and amenities. Right now, the priority should be joining JVL-Ext to SV road instead of razing decades old commercial structures."

The BMC plans to join the gap between JVL-Ext and SV road with a 1.8-km road. "We have to demolish the illegal structures to widen road. Widening work will start in January," said Gaikwad.

WHEN DREAMS TAKE FLIGHT



Differently abled children witnessed an air show at INS Shikra in Mumbai on Wednesday, as part of Navy Day celebrations.

PRAKASH CHARGE/HT

SENIOR CITIZEN POSED AS DOC FOR YEARS, HELD IN BHIWANDI

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BHIWANDI: The Bhiwandi police arrested a 64-year-old man on Tuesday for posing as a doctor for the past few years.

Police said Shahalam Altaf Ahmed Ansari relied on fake certificates to convince patients, who he gave allopathic medicines to in Khadipar, Bhiwandi.

A few days ago, health department officials received a tip-off about this. They went to Ansari's clinic, but could not find the certificates.

"We arrested the accused from his clinic. He was produced in court and remanded in police custody for five days. We did not find any original certificates at his house either," said D Bhande, investigating officer, Nizampura police station.

Bhande added that the accused not only prescribed basic medicines, but also certain specialised remedies, which should be prescribed only by experienced doctors.

"We are also questioning the locals," he said.

NOT THE FIRST SUCH CASE

The Deonar police arrested a man on Thursday for posing as a doctor and administering an injection to a 25-year-old patient, killing him

Police said the man, Shahbaaz Alam Siddiqui, studied only till Class 12. He set up a dispensary, where he had been displaying his dead brother's Bachelor of Unani Medicine and Surgery degree for the past four years.

After NCP, Cong plans protest against govt

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MUMBAI: Within hours of the NCP announcing a state-wide 10-day march against the BJP-led state government, the Congress, too announced an agitation.

The party said it would start a Jan Akrosh Yatra on November 26, Aurangabad's Constitution Day, which would culminate on December 13 in Nagpur, after covering 13 suicide-affected districts. The decision to launch a state-

wide rally was taken at a core committee meeting attended by key state leaders on Tuesday.

The Congress plans to raise issues related to farmers, including suicides and unemployment, and the government's failure to address them.

Both the Congress and the NCP seem to be banking on the discontent and anger among farmers over the slow pace of loan waiver disbursements, the fall in agricultural produce rates, the rise in inflation and increasing

unemployment to turn the political future in their favour.

However, unlike Sangharsh Yatra, held earlier this year to demand loan waiver for farmers, the two parties have decided to hold protest marches independently.

"After holding Jan Akrosh sabhas in various talukas and districts, the 18-day yatra will cover Marathwada and Vidarbha," said Congress leader and former minister Abdul Sattar. "At least 800 farmers have ended their lives in the past six months in Mara-

thwada alone. The plight of farmers throughout the state is the same, and we are highlighting it through this yatra."

Sattar said the morcha in Nagpur on December 13, when the state legislature will be in session, will see lakhs of farmers participate. The Congress plans to take the agitation to 50 constituencies. "We will hold four meetings a day to highlight issues like inflation, unemployment and suicides," said Vijay Vadeettiwar, Congress leader from Vidarbha.

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