



## **PRESS RELEASE**

**05.06.2025**

Directorate of Enforcement (ED), Kolkata Zonal Office has conducted search operations at various premises spread across West Bengal, Delhi, Bihar, UP and Assam linked to a racket operating Mule Accounts and illegal betting & gambling under the provisions of Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002. During the search operations, various incriminating documents including digital devices have been found & seized. Further, 766 mule bank accounts and 17 Debit / Credit Cards linked to the activities connected with Proceeds of Crime (POC) have also been frozen. Further, two persons namely Vishal Bhardwaj alias Badal Bhardwaj and Sonu Kr. Thakur have been arrested under Section 19 of the PMLA, 2002. The arrested persons were produced before the Hon'ble Special Court (PMLA), Calcutta, which granted ED custody for 10 days.

The case pertains to an FIR registered under various sections of Indian Penal Code, 1860 and West Bengal Gambling and Prize Competitions Act, 1957 by Siliguri Police Commissionerate, West Bengal. Vishal Bharadwaj @ Badal Bhardwaj and Sonu Kr. Thakur were listed as accused and shown as absconders in the chargesheet filed by the Police. Both were arrested during the search by ED.

The modus operandi includes opening of mule bank accounts (saving, current and corporate accounts) by recruiting people to act as money mules in exchange of money paid either as a one-time basis or on a recurring monthly basis, depending on the nature and utility of the account. These bank accounts are specifically intended for the collection and subsequent layering of proceeds generated through illegal online betting and gambling activities being run through websites and telegram channels. These mule account holders have no control over or access to the accounts. The scamsters induced people to contact through WhatsApp numbers for betting and gambling in different games like IPL, ISL, T20 World Cup, Online Rummy, Online Casino, etc.

Further investigation is in progress.