2nd NATIONAL TRIAL ADVOCACY COMPETITION, 2026

Faculty of Law, The ICFAI University, Himachal Pradesh

(This trial Proposition is purely fictional and prepared solely for academic purposes.)

STATE OF ARYAVARTA
VERSUS
AKHAND KALMADI & JUSTIN WOODPOND

SynapseLink Technologies Pvt. Ltd. ("SynapseLink" or "the Company") is a private technology company incorporated in the year 2018 by two college friends, Anant Verma and Akhand Kalmadi. The Company's principal commercial asset is the SynapseLink Transfer Protocol ("STP"), a proprietary data-transmission technology that permits the transfer of very large datasets between devices across long distances at markedly reduced latency and infrastructure cost.

It is undisputed that STP was almost entirely conceived and engineered by Anant Verma (CTO), while Akhand Kalmadi (CBO) drove commercial growth, investor relations and strategy. The company grew to over sixty employees and a multi-thousand-crore valuation.

The founders' relationship was nonetheless marked by recurring friction over technical credit, equity, board representation and strategic direction. It is against this backdrop, converging with a large impending investment round and a parallel undisclosed foreign negotiation by the deceased, that Anant Verma died on the night of 21–22 March 2026 at a corporate retreat in Devgarh Hills.

In June 2025, during a company town hall attended by sixty-plus employees, the following exchange occurred:

Anant: "Without STP there is no company, don't forget that Akhand."

Akhand: "Without me nobody would even know STP exists Anant. Nikola Tesla died penniless while Edison won, you'd do well to recognise my input too."

The exchange became widely discussed internally. Employee witnesses differ on the tone—some describe it as heated, others as the usual founder banter.

In September 2025, Akhand Kalmadi secured a major investment commitment from renowned technology investor Justin Woodpond. Following this, major strategic meetings increasingly excluded Anant.

Board minutes show Akhand Kalmadi and Woodpond jointly proposed a dilution of founder voting rights to open the company further for investment, a move Anant vehemently opposed. Independent director Mr. Dinesh Ramanathan abstained from voting on the dilution proposal, citing the need for SEBI-compliant disclosure norms to be completed first. This procedural objection delayed the new funding round by months.

Unbeknownst to the board, Anant had initiated confidential talks with Helion Dynamics, a Singapore-based firm, to independently license a modified version of STP for non-Indian markets.

On 12 January 2026, SynapseLink was invited to the National Unicorn Summit. Only Akhand Kalmadi and Woodpond represented the company. Anant was absent. Media outlets began reporting a possible founder dispute, with one publication carrying the headline: "Has SynapseLink Moved Beyond Its Inventor?"

Internal company communications from February 2026 reveal negotiations for a new investment round valuing SynapseLink at Rs. 9,000 crore, alongside draft proposals suggesting Anant be pressured to assign additional patent rights to the company and step down from operational control.

Three weeks before his death, Anant sent a text message to his sister, Meera:

> *"They are trying to erase me from my own creation. I'm losing my mind over this betrayal I can't sleep I can't breathe I'm getting panic attacks"*

The night before his death, Anant left his sister a voicemail, recovered from her phone:

> *"Tomorrow I'm putting the Helion proposal on the table whether they like it or not. Win or lose I must move ahead."*

On 21 March 2026, Anant attended a board retreat at an isolated luxury eco-resort in Devgarh Hills, a property co-owned by Akhand Kalmadi. Present at the retreat were Anant Verma, Akhand Kalmadi, Justin Woodpond, and three senior executives.

At 10:45 p.m. at the resort bar, a staff member overheard an exchange between the founders where Anant explicitly stated to Akhand Kalmadi, "Singapore is offering me a way out, and I'm taking it."

At approximately 11:20 p.m., Anant retired to his private villa.

At 8:50 a.m. the following morning, when Anant failed to appear for breakfast, Akhand Kalmadi went to his villa. Finding the door unresponsive to knocking, Akhand opened it with a master administrative credentials which he possessed for all smart room controls. The villa door had been secured from the inside with an electronic deadbolt.

Anant was found unresponsive on the bed. Akhand and a staff member attempted CPR before the resort doctor arrived. An ambulance was called at 8:58 a.m., and Anant was formally declared dead at 9:12 a.m.

The Forensic Science Laboratory team arrived approximately five hours after the body was discovered. Police recovered Anant's laptop, smartwatch, tablet device, prescription medication, and a half-consumed herbal beverage.

An analysis of the resort's digital infrastructure revealed a critical anomaly during the probable hours of death:

Between 2:00 a.m. and 2:15 a.m., the resort's environmental-control system logs show that the internal AC ventilation system for Anant's villa was manually overridden from the central server room. Simultaneously, the CCTV camera covering the hallway outside Anant's villa went offline due to an "unscheduled firmware update," resulting in a 15-minute complete blackout in video surveillance.

A figure resembling Woodpond was observed around the server room at around 10:30 pm chatting with an employee but the identity could not be confirmed on account of the grainy footage.

On the morning of the discovery, prior to the police formally seizing the electronic devices, Ms. Kavya Reddy (Head of IT Security for SynapseLink) accessed Anant's laptop, citing the need to "secure confidential company assets."

During this window, she extracted the emails detailing the Helion Dynamics negotiations onto a USB drive. She handed the laptop to the police three hours later. Digital forensics later

confirmed that no hash value was generated at the exact time of Ms. Reddy's extraction to certify the integrity of the data at the moment of cloning.

Furthermore, digital analysts recovered deleted communication fragments between the accused from the days leading up to the retreat:

Woodpond: "After the next board meeting, the obstacle disappears."

Akhand Kalmadi: "We need complete control."

Akhand Kalmadi: "Once his approval is out of the way we're clear."

Also found was an unsent draft email from Anant to Meera reminiscing about simpler childhood days.

MEDICAL AND FORENSIC EVIDENCE

A. Crime Scene and Digital Anomalies

The Forensic Science Laboratory ("FSL") team arrived at the scene approximately five hours after the discovery of the body. The following items were recovered from the villa and its immediate vicinity: the deceased's laptop computer, a smartwatch, a tablet device, a quantity of prescription medication, and a half-consumed herbal beverage found on the bedside table.

An analysis of the resort's digital infrastructure logs disclosed a material anomaly during the probable window of death. Between 2:00 a.m. and 2:15 a.m. on 22 March 2026, the environmental-control system logs record that the internal air-conditioning and ventilation system for Villa 4 was manually overridden from the resort's central server room. During the same fifteen-minute window, the CCTV camera covering the hallway outside Villa 4 went offline, the resort's records attributing this to an "unscheduled firmware update", resulting in a complete blackout of video surveillance for that corridor for the duration stated. The examination of the smart-door logs showed no sign of override during the night.

Separately, grainy CCTV footage from around 10:30 p.m. on 21 March 2026 shows a figure resembling Justin Woodpond in the vicinity of the server room, apparently in conversation with a resort employee; the identification of the figure as Woodpond has not been conclusively confirmed on account of the poor quality of the footage.

B. Medico-Legal Case (MLC) Report

Reproduced below, for the purposes of trial, is the Medico-Legal Case report prepared upon the deceased being brought to the mortuary of the District Government Hospital, New Aryapuram.

MEDICO-LEGAL CASE REPORT

MLC Register No.: MLC/2026/0341

Name of deceased: Anant Verma

Age / Sex: 35 years / Male

Brought by: Devgarh Hills Police Station, escorted by Constable R. Yadav, along with resort security officer

Date and time of examination: 22.03.2026, 09:40 hours

Reference / requisition: Requisition from Inspector Vikram Singh, Devgarh Hills P.S., for medico-legal examination and post-mortem

History given: Male found unresponsive in a locked private villa at a resort; CPR administered on site; declared dead at 09:12 hours by doctor Dr. K. Balan.

General condition on receipt: Rigor mortis present in upper extremities; no external signs of struggle noted on preliminary external examination; no visible external injuries, abrasions or ligature marks

Provisional impression: Sudden unexplained death; cause to be ascertained on post-mortem examination and toxicological analysis

Action taken: Body preserved and referred for post-mortem examination under intimation to the Investigating Officer; viscera and blood samples reserved for forensic toxicology

Examining Medical Officer: Dr. S. N. Patil, Chief Autopsy Surgeon,District Government Hospital, New Aryapuram

C. Post-Mortem and Toxicology Findings

The preliminary medical opinion attributed the cause of death to acute respiratory collapse. Subsequent forensic toxicology examination identified trace quantities of synthetic compounds

typically found in medication prescribed for severe anxiety disorders, which are known to function by lowering blood pressure and depressing the respiratory drive. Corresponding trace quantities of the same class of compound were separately detected upon forensic examination of the ventilation filters recovered from Villa 4.

Medical experts examined by the investigation have expressed divergent opinions as to the origin of these compounds, identifying three possible explanations: (a) an adverse interaction with, or accidental overdose of, medication already prescribed to the deceased;
(b) accidental environmental exposure through the villa's ventilation system for reasons unconnected with any third party; and
(c) deliberate external administration of the compound within the villa's localised environment by a third party.
The final post-mortem report concludes in the following terms: "The manner of death cannot be determined with absolute certainty."

D. Forensic Science Laboratory Report — Summary

Exhibit examined	**Finding**
Herbal beverage (half-consumed), Villa 4 bedside table	Trace residue consistent with anxiolytic compound class detected; quantity insufficient for independent confirmation of route of administration
Ventilation filter, Villa 4 AC unit	Trace quantities of the same compound class detected in filter medium
Blood and viscera samples of deceased	Presence of synthetic anxiolytic compound metabolites confirmed; concentration stated to be within a range consistent with non-therapeutic exposure.
Prescription medication strip recovered from villa	Confirmed to be a prescribed anxiety/blood-pressure regulating medication in the deceased's name, partially consumed

Exhibit examined	Finding
Environmental control system server logs	Confirms manual override of Villa 4 ventilation between 02:00 and 02:15 hours from the central server room terminal
CCTV server (hallway, Villa 4 corridor)	Confirms 15-minute recording gap between 02:00 and 02:15 hours attributed in system logs to a firmware update event
Smart-door logs of Villa 4	Show no sign of manual override during the night of the death.

INVESTIGATION AND SEIZURES

A. Chain of Custody

On the morning of the discovery of the body, and prior to the formal seizure of electronic devices by the police, Ms. Kavya Reddy, Head of IT Security for SynapseLink, accessed the deceased's laptop computer, stating that she did so in order to "secure confidential company assets". During this period of access, she extracted a set of emails relating to the Helion Dynamics negotiations onto a USB storage device. The laptop was handed over to the police approximately three hours later.

Digital forensic examination subsequently confirmed that no cryptographic hash value was generated at the precise time of Ms. Reddy's extraction, such as would ordinarily certify the integrity of the data at the moment of cloning. This omission forms the basis of a dispute between the parties as to the admissibility and evidentiary weight of the extracted material under the applicable provisions governing electronic records.

Digital forensic analysts additionally recovered the following deleted communication fragments exchanged between the Accused in the days preceding the retreat:

- Woodpond: "After the next board meeting, the obstacle disappears."
- Akhand Kalmadi: "We need complete control."
- Akhand Kalmadi: "Once his approval is out of the way we're clear."

Also recovered was an unsent draft email composed by Anant Verma and addressed to his sister, Meera Verma, reminiscing about their shared childhood, apparently composed at some point prior to his death and never transmitted.

B. List of Exhibits Seized

Ex. No.	Description	Seized from / Recovered by
Ex. P-1	Deceased's laptop computer (with forensic image)	Villa 4; handed over by Ms. Kavya Reddy to I.O.
Ex. P-2	Deceased's smartwatch	Villa 4, bedside table
Ex. P-3	Deceased's tablet device	Villa 4, work desk
Ex. P-4	Strip of prescription anxiety/blood-pressure medication	Villa 4, bathroom cabinet
Ex. P-5	Half-consumed herbal beverage in ceramic cup	Villa 4, bedside table
Ex. P-6	Ventilation filter unit, Villa 4 AC system	Villa 4, AC vent, removed by FSL team
Ex. P-7	USB storage device containing extracted Helion Dynamics emails	Recovered from Ms. Kavya Reddy
Ex. P-8	Certified printout of environmental-control server logs (02:00–02:15 hrs)	Resort central server room, seized under panchnama
Ex. P-9	Certified printout of CCTV server logs showing recording gap	Resort central server room, seized under panchnama
Ex. P-10	CCTV footage (server room vicinity, 21.03.2026, ~22:30 hrs)	Resort CCTV archive

Ex. No.	Description	Seized from / Recovered by
Ex. P-11	Mobile phone of Meera Verma (voicemail and text message extracted)	Produced by PW-1 and forensically cloned
Ex. P-12	Forensic report of deleted communication fragments between Accused Nos. 1 and 2	FSL cyber cell, extracted from company servers
Ex. P-13	Post-mortem report and viscera examination report	District Government Hospital, New Aryapuram
Ex. P-14	Toxicology report	FSL, State of Aryavarta
Ex. P-15	Board meeting minutes recording founder voting-rights dilution proposal	SynapseLink corporate records, produced by DW-1

All exhibits were seized and sealed in the presence of independent panch witnesses, save for Exhibits P-1 and P-7, whose chain of custody prior to formal police seizure is disputed.

WITNESS STATEMENTS

PROSECUTION WITNESSES

PW-1: Meera Verma (Complainant, sister of the deceased)

My brother grew highly anxious, suffered panic attacks, and felt pushed out of his company. Three weeks before his death, he texted that they were trying to erase him from his creation. The night before dying, he left a voicemail stating he would put the Helion proposal on the table, win or lose. I do not believe he committed suicide, as his final message spoke of moving forward.

PW-2: Ms. Kavya Reddy (Head of IT Security, SynapseLink)

Upon learning of Anant's death, I accessed his company laptop to secure sensitive commercial data and STP intellectual property. I copied emails regarding Helion Dynamics onto a USB drive and handed the laptop to police three hours later. Due to an oversight, I did not generate a hash value, but I had no intent to alter or fabricate data, nor did the Accused instruct me to access it.

PW-3: Dr. S. N. Patil (Chief Autopsy Surgeon)

I conducted the post-mortem on 22 March 2026. There were no external injuries or struggle marks; internal findings showed acute respiratory collapse. Toxicology revealed an anxiety compound that lowers blood pressure and depresses respiration. The medical evidence cannot determine whether consumption was voluntary, accidental, or administered by a third party, leaving the manner of death uncertain.

PW-4: Inspector Vikram Singh (Investigating Officer)

I investigated the scene at Villa 4, which was deadbolted from the inside with no signs of forced entry. Resort logs revealed a 15-minute environmental override and CCTV blackout between 02:00 and 02:15 hours. After recovering deleted communication fragments and learning PW-2 accessed the laptop before seizure, I found sufficient ground to arrest the Accused.

DEFENCE WITNESSES

DW-1: Akhand Kalmadi (CBO, SynapseLink)

Anant and I were college friends who co-founded the company. I proposed diluting founder voting rights strictly to open the company for vital institutional investment, not to cause harm. Disagreements were standard founder dynamics. My deleted message, *"once his approval is out of the way we're clear,"* referred entirely to resolving corporate voting deadlocks and investment bottlenecks.

DW-2: Justin Woodpond (Angel Investor and Board Member, SynapseLink)

My role was strictly limited to financial restructuring to secure an upcoming funding round valuing the company at Rs. 9,000 crore. I proposed the voting dilution to meet institutional funding standards. My text, *"After the next board meeting, the obstacle disappears,"* referred solely to overcoming the corporate voting deadlock and SEBI-compliant disclosure delays.

DW-3: Mr. Dinesh Ramanathan (Independent Director, SynapseLink)

I served as an independent director for over three years. I abstained from the dilution vote solely because SEBI-compliant disclosure norms were not yet met, recording this in the minutes. I never observed any threatening or harmful conduct by either Accused. Co-founder disagreements were usual, and forcing Anant to step down or assign patents remained unexecuted draft proposals.

DW-4: Dr. Anjali Desai (Independent Forensic Toxicologist)

The concentration of the anxiety compound in the deceased's samples is entirely consistent with non-therapeutic use of his own prescription and does not prove third-party administration. Trace amounts in the ventilation filters could easily be innocent residual airborne contamination from his personal room use. No definitive conclusion can be drawn among the three possible manners of death.

DW-5: Rahul Mehta (Resort Maintenance Manager, Devgarh Hills Eco-Resort)

The resort's CCTV system has previously experienced similar automated firmware-update blackouts without manual initiation. The server room keypad code was known to multiple senior

resort staff members, not to the Accused alone. It is impossible to state with certainty who, if anyone, manually triggered the villa ventilation override or the CCTV blackout.

FIR AND CHARGES

A. First Information Report

FIRST INFORMATION REPORT

(Under Section 173, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023)

P.S.: Devgarh Hills Police Station, District New Aryapuram, State of Aryavarta

FIR No.: 0087/2026

Date and time of registration: 22.03.2026, 12:15 hours

Sections of law at the time of registration: Sections 103(1) [murder] and 61(2) [criminal conspiracy] of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, read together, pending investigation

Complainant: Meera Verma, D/o. Late Ramesh Verma, resident of New Aryapuram

Information received from: Telephonic and subsequent written complaint of Meera Verma, following intimation received from SynapseLink management regarding the death of her brother

Brief facts as stated in the complaint: The complainant states that her brother, Anant Verma, was found dead in suspicious circumstances at a company retreat at Devgarh Hills Eco-Resort on the morning of 22.03.2026. The complainant states that her brother had, in the weeks preceding his death, expressed to her serious apprehension regarding attempts by his business partners, Akhand Kalmadi and Justin Woodpond, to remove him from control of the company he had co-founded, and that he intended to proceed with an independent overseas licensing arrangement opposed by the said partners. The complainant states her belief that the death was not natural and requests that the matter be investigated as one of murder.

Action taken: Case registered; Investigating Officer deputed; scene of occurrence secured and referred to Forensic Science Laboratory

B. Arrest Memo

MEMO OF ARREST

Name of arrestee: Akhand Kalmadi

Date and time of arrest: 02.04.2026, 18:40 hours

Place of arrest: Corporate office of SynapseLink Technologies Pvt. Ltd., New Aryapuram

Sections: Sections 103(1) and 61(2), Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023

Grounds of arrest: Recovery of deleted communications between the Accused indicating a plan to remove an "obstacle" prior to the date of death; possession of exclusive master access credentials to the villa's locking mechanism; overheard confrontation with the deceased hours before death; disputed chain of custody of the deceased's electronic devices

Arresting officer: Inspector Vikram Singh, Devgarh Hills Police Station

Witness to arrest / informed relative: Arrest memo attested by an independent witness and information of arrest communicated to a named family member/friend of the arrestee as required by law; arrestee produced before the jurisdictional Magistrate within twenty-four hours

Medical examination: Arrestee medically examined prior to and after the period of police custody, as required

A substantially similar memo of arrest was prepared in respect of Accused No. 2, Justin Woodpond, arrested on 03.04.2026 at 09:15 hours from his residence in New Aryapuram, on similar grounds, including his presence near the server room on the night in question and his authorship of the deleted message referring to an "obstacle" that would "disappear" after the next board meeting.

9. CHARGE SHEET SUMMARY

Case No.: FIR 0087/2026, Devgarh Hills P.S.

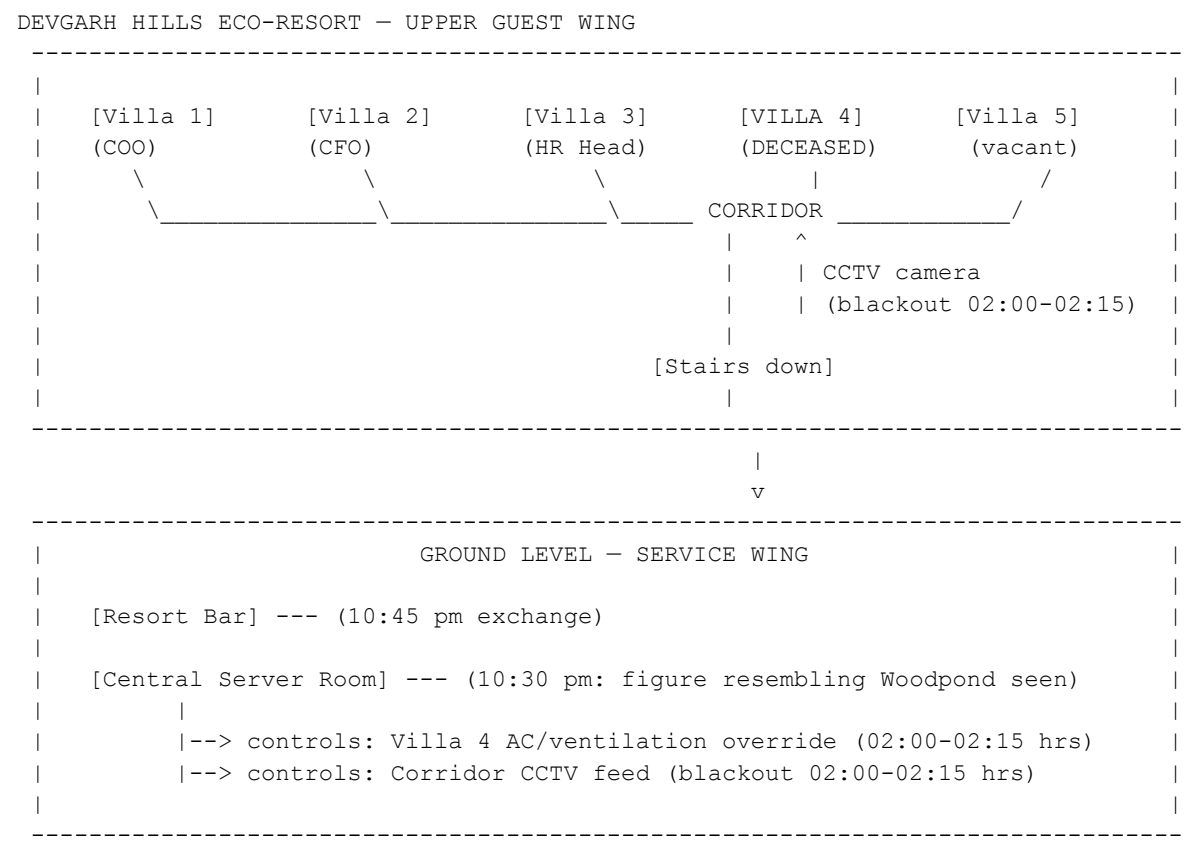
Accused persons charged: 1. Akhand Kalmadi 2. Justin Woodpond

Sections charged: Section 103(1) (murder) read with Section 3(5) (common intention) and Section 61(2) (criminal conspiracy) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023

Summary of allegations: The investigation concludes that the Accused persons, motivated by a desire to prevent the deceased from proceeding with an independent licensing arrangement and from asserting his rights within the Company, entered into a criminal conspiracy pursuant to which the deceased was rendered unconscious and his death caused through the localised introduction of an anxiolytic/respiratory-depressant compound into the environment of his villa, facilitated by a manual override of the ventilation system and a concurrent interruption of CCTV surveillance, both traced to the resort's server room during the relevant window on the intervening night.

Evidence relied upon: the recovered deleted communications between the Accused; the overheard confrontation at the resort bar; Accused No. 1's exclusive possession of master access credentials to the villa; the presence of a figure resembling Accused No. 2 near the server room shortly before the override; the environmental-control and CCTV server logs; the toxicological findings; and the surrounding motive evidence concerning the corporate dispute, restructuring, and the Helion Dynamics negotiations.

SITE PLAN (TEXTUAL DIAGRAM)



LEGEND:

Villa 4 : Scene of occurrence; door secured from inside by electronic deadbolt; opened by Akhand Kalmadi at 08:50 hrs using master administrative credentials; no signs of forced entry.

Corridor CCTV : Sole camera covering approach to Villa 4;offline 02:00-02:15 hrs.

Server Room : Source of both the ventilation override and the CCTV interruption; accessible by keypad code known to multiple senior staff, not exclusively to the accused.

ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Whether Anant Verma's death was Homicidal.
2. Whether Akhand Kalmadi and Justin Woodpond entered into a criminal conspiracy resulting in the death of Anant Verma.

Note:

1. **The organisers reserve the right to assign any witness to portray a character of a different gender if required for the purposes of the competition.**

2. **The allocation and assignment of witnesses for each round shall be solely at the discretion of the organisers.**