

Singapore

## Couple who ran Boat Quay nightclubs gets jail, fine in Singapore's first labour trafficking sentencing



File photo of a gavel (Photo: Jeremy Long)

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**SINGAPORE:** A married couple who ran two nightclubs at Boat Quay became the first to be sentenced under the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act that came into force in Singapore in 2015.

Malkar Savlaram Anant, 51, and his wife Priyanka Bhattacharya Rajesh, 31, were each sentenced on Tuesday (Feb 11) to five years and six months jail and a S\$7,500 fine.

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They were also sentenced for offences under the Women's Charter.

The couple were in November last year [found guilty \(/news/singapore/first-labour-trafficking-conviction-boat-quay-bangladesh-women-12097206\)](/news/singapore/first-labour-trafficking-conviction-boat-quay-bangladesh-women-12097206) of exploiting their three workers and coaxing one of them into prostituting herself.

Malkar was also ordered to pay a compensation of S\$4,878.31 in unpaid salary to one of the women.

Court documents showed the women were promised jobs as dancers at clubs Kanggan and Kickk, with a monthly salary of 60,000 Bangladeshi taka (S\$982).

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But they were subjected to "oppressive conditions" during their time here, said Deputy Public Prosecutors James Chew and Rimplejit Kaur in their case against the duo in written submissions after a trial spanning more than 20 days.

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Malkar, who was also known as “Dada” or “Johnny” claimed trial to five charges, three under the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act (PHTA) — one for each woman he allegedly harboured by means of abuse of power for the purpose of exploitation or servitude between Dec 23, 2015 and Jun 1, 2016.

In their case, the prosecution cited "difficult work conditions, verbal abuse, onerous financial penalties should they decide to resign, close surveillance and tight control over their movement and communications".

The women were not allowed to keep the tips they earned, although dancers at both clubs were meant to generate income through customer tips. Two of them were not paid their monthly salaries.

In sentencing them, District Judge Shaiffuddin Saruwan said: "Both of you have played integral roles in the vice ring as main perpetrators."

They sourced for customers and decided the prices of sexual services, Mr Shaiffuddin said.

He added that the couple had total control over the women who were deceived into believing they were here to work as dancers.

They had no freedom of movement throughout their stay, and were isolated and vulnerable, he said.

They were under psychological pressure including threats of non-payment of salary to coerce them into prostitution, he added.

He said the operation had a transnational element to it as they procured sex workers from Bangladesh.

"This tarnishes Singapore's reputation", he said, adding that such cases are difficult to detect when they are under the "protective cloak" of legitimate businesses.

The couple's lawyer K Jayaram Naidu said he will be appealing against both the conviction and sentence.

The couple, who are out on bail, will have to report weekly to a police station for monitoring purposes.

They could have been jailed up to 10 years and fined up to S\$100,000.

Source: CNA/ga(mn)

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