

Jail, fine for couple who exploited nightclub workers



Malkar Savlaram Anant (left) and Priyanka Bhattacharya Rajesh were each sentenced to five years and six months' jail yesterday.

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A couple who exploited their three female nightclub workers, even coaxing one of them into prostituting herself, were each sentenced to five years and six months' jail yesterday.

Indian nationals Malkar Savlaram Anant, 51, and Priyanka Bhattacharya Rajesh, 31, who are husband and wife, were also fined \$7,500 each.

In addition, Malkar was ordered to pay compensation of \$4,878.31 to one of the women over unpaid wages.

In the first conviction of a labour-trafficking case in Singapore under the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act, the couple were each found guilty in November last year of three counts of abusing their power to exploit their victims.

Priyanka was also convicted of three prostitution-related offences under the Women's Charter.

Her husband was found guilty of two similar charges.

The couple managed Hindi entertainment clubs in Singapore.

The victims and their workplaces cannot be named due to a gag order to protect their identities.

Deputy public prosecutors James Chew and Rimplejit Kaur had stated in their submissions that Malkar was the sole managing operator of one club in the city area and was responsible for recruiting performing artists at another nightspot nearby.

He recruited three Bangladeshi women as dancers for the clubs, and they lived with the couple in an apartment.

The husband and wife jointly managed the day-to-day operations of the two clubs and their employees. The court heard that Malkar and Priyanka also confiscated the women's passports, work permits and mobile phones.

Priyanka told one of the victims that she had to "go out with customers", which the victim testified to mean having sex with customers.

The woman told the court during the trial that she wanted to return to Bangladesh upon learning this, but Priyanka told her she had to pay 400,000 Bangladeshi taka (S\$6,500) first.

Priyanka approached her with this proposal a number of times, and told her that she could remit half the earnings back home.

But each time the Bangladeshi returned to their apartment after having sex with the customers, Priyanka would search her body to take away the money and items she had received.

The woman fled the club through its back door in May 2016, after working for about five months.

The other two women stopped working at the other club soon after.

Defence lawyer Jayakumar Naidu told the court yesterday that his clients intend to appeal against their conviction and sentences.

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