

Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

District of Minnesota

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, February 6, 2019

Columbia Heights Restaurant Owner Sentenced To 42 Months In Prison For Visa Fraud And Harboring An Illegal Worker

United States Attorney Erica H. MacDonald today announced the sentencing of PISANU SUKHTIPYAROGÉ, a/k/a "Pat," 72, owner of the Royal Orchid Restaurant, to 42 months in prison for visa fraud and alien harboring. The sentence was handed down by U.S. District Judge Wilhelmina M. Wright in St. Paul, Minnesota.

"This defendant not only violated our immigration laws, he exploited a young, vulnerable victim for his own financial and sexual benefit," said Assistant United States Attorney Laura M. Provinzino. "While nothing can make the victim truly whole, the prison sentence - which was above the guideline range for his crimes - and restitution ordered by the Court represent a just outcome. Our hope is that this brave, resilient victim can finally move forward."

"This individual used his knowledge of our laws to fraudulently bring the victim to our country on smoke and mirror promises of the American Dream," said Special Agent in Charge Tracy J. Cormier, of HSI St. Paul. "Instead he used the victim for sex and forced them to work at his business without pay. HSI is proud of the work accomplished in bringing Sukhtipyaroge to justice."

According to the defendant's guilty plea and documents filed in court, in July 2015, SUKHTIPYAROGÉ assisted in the procurement of an F-1 student visa for an individual identified as A.M., a citizen of the Dominican Republic whom the defendant met and befriended. At the time, SUKHTIPYAROGÉ was very familiar with the F-1 student visa process and knew that an F-1 student visa is a temporary, non-immigrant visa that does not permit employment in the United States. SUKHTIPYAROGÉ used false statements in preparing the visa application and instructed A.M. as to what he should and should not say during the visa interview.

According to the defendant's guilty plea and documents filed in court, October 19, 2015, upon arrival in the United States, A.M. lived with the defendant and the defendant's family in Maplewood and attended Edison High School until May 2016. At some point during this time, A.M. began living and working at the Royal Orchid Restaurant in Columbia Heights. At the restaurant, A.M. was subjected to poor living and working conditions. SUKHTIPYAROGÉ told A.M. he would be paid \$500 per month in cash for his labor; however, A.M. did not receive the promised pay each month, as SUKHTIPYAROGÉ deducted the costs incurred in bringing A.M. to the United States in a debt bondage scheme. A.M. also worked at SUKHTIPYAROGÉ'S home in Maplewood without pay. SUKHTIPYAROGÉ admitted to engaging in a sexual relationship with A.M. shortly after he brought A.M. to the United States.

SUKHTIPYAROGÉ has also been charged in Anoka County with one felony count of third degree criminal sexual conduct and one felony count of labor trafficking.

This case was the result of an investigation conducted by Homeland Security Investigations, the Anoka County Sheriff's Office, U.S. Department of State Diplomatic Security Service, and U.S. Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division.

The District of Minnesota is one of six districts designated through a competitive, nationwide selection process as a Phase II Anti-Trafficking Coordination Team (ACTeam), through the interagency ACTeam Initiative of the Departments of Justice, Homeland Security and Labor. ACTeams focus on developing high-impact human trafficking investigations and prosecutions involving forced labor, international sex trafficking and sex trafficking by force, fraud or coercion through interagency collaboration among federal prosecutors and federal investigative agencies.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Melinda A. Williams and Laura M. Provinzino prosecuted the case.

Defendant Information:

PISANU SUKHTIPYAROG, a/k/a "Pat," 72

Maplewood, Minn.

Convicted:

- Visa fraud, 1 count
- Alien harboring, 1 count

Sentenced:

- 42 months in prison
- 3 years of supervised release
- Restitution ordered – amount to be determined at a later date

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