

Indian-American pleads guilty in sex trafficking case in US

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New York: A 74-year-old Indian-American motel owner has pleaded guilty to benefiting financially from sex traffickers who beat women for prostitution in the rooms he rented them at inflated rates.

Kanubhai Patel, who could face a maximum of five years in prison, ignored women's screams for help as pimps beat them, according to court evidence.

Patel pleaded guilty to one count of benefiting financially from trafficking in persons. He also went by the names like "Kenny" and "Pop".

Patel acknowledged that in his role as the former owner of the motel (in Louisiana's New Orleans City), he regularly rented rooms to individuals, who are charged as sex trafficking co-conspirators in connection with this case, knowing they were pimps who forced and coerced women to engage in prostitution, according to evidence presented before court.

Patel admitted that although he never personally recruited, groomed or coerced any of the victims, he benefited financially from the sex trafficking operation. Evidence established that Patel would charge the pimps and sex trafficking co-conspirators higher rates than other motel guests and would open the motel's gate to allow the women to bring customers back to the hotel.

Patel learned that members of the sex trafficking conspiracy physically assaulted women they prostituted, including one instance in which a co-conspirator brutally beat one woman with a large piece of wood while she screamed for help, leaving her with multiple lacerations and what appeared to be a broken arm.

He did not report the activities of the people engaging in sex trafficking to the police as long as they paid their rent. "This defendant callously profited from a sex trafficking venture that used force, fraud and coercion to compel women to engage in commercial sex acts," US Attorney Kenneth Allen Polite Jr of the Eastern District of Louisiana said.

"These crimes often pass without detection because victims live in fear from physical abuse, threats and other forms of coercion. My office is committed to prosecuting individuals and organisations that profit from this illegal conduct," he added.

Patel faces a statutory maximum sentence of five years in prison for benefiting financially from participating in a trafficking scheme involving control of victims' identification documents.

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