

KATHMANDU: "This was my first trip to Nepal," says the thin bespectacled man from [Mumbai](#) with a grimace, sitting in the fenced-in enclosure of Kathmandu's [Bhadra Jail](#) where visitors are allowed to meet undertrials. "And it is definitely going to be my last."

The 39-year-old, who says he is the marketing manager for a new casino that was scheduled to open in Goa during Dussehra, has been slapped with trafficking charges by Nepal Police and now faces a prison sentence of up to 10 years or a fine of NRS 1 million or both.

"I came to Nepal on Sept 14 via Gorakhpur to recruit trained staff for Casino Lucky, which was to have been inaugurated in Goa in October," says the Sikh, who does not want to be named, saying the news of his arrest would come as a shock for his wife, who is a heart patient.

He stayed in a hotel in Thamel, the tourist hub in Kathmandu, he says, interviewing both men and women for the new casino. "A Nepali girl, who worked in a Nepali casino in Pokhara, got in touch, saying she and her friends wanted to apply for jobs at Casino Lucky since theirs, the Fulbari Casino in Pokhara, was floundering due to the launch of a second casino in Pokhara, the Casino Grande," he explains. "I interviewed 16 of them, including a male cook and finally, 14 were hired."

It was then that the trouble started. The [Goa casino](#), he says, wanted to take the girls to [India](#) by land since it could not afford the plane fares. One of the girls first kicked up a fuss about and later, when she was persuaded by her other friends, her mother lodged a complaint with police. On Sept 30, when the group was readying to go to Sunauli on the Indo-Nepal border, police arrived at the hotel, arrested the marketing manager and charged him with human trafficking.

A week later, when a second man from the same organisation came to reportedly bail him out with documents, he too was arrested and slapped with the same charge. The second Indian is currently being held in the Central Jail. Police said there were contradictions in the Indian job offer and that none of the girls had been given an appointment letter.

Eerily, the plight of the two men comes even as a third Indian is facing police suspicions in Nepal. Rakesh Wadhwa, a former chartered accountant from [New Delhi](#) who gradually became known as Nepal's casino king, running an empire of seven casinos in the city, is facing

a police crackdown. The police move came amidst allegations that the five casinos currently under the control of Wadhwa's

[Nepal Recreation Centre](#)

are flouting a ban and allowing Nepalis to have an illegal flutter. As per Nepal's laws, its 10 casinos can only admit non-Nepalis. Nepalis face a fine of NRS 300 and short-term detention if found gambling.

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