



## News Releases

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MILWAUKEE, WI

### **Milwaukee man from India found guilty in religious worker visa fraud scheme**

MILWAUKEE – A religious leader from India, who founded a local Hindu temple, was found guilty of fraudulently obtaining and then selling religious worker visas to Indian nationals. The guilty verdict stems from an investigation conducted by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI).

On Nov. 10, a federal jury in the Eastern District of Wisconsin found Sagarsen Haldar, 31, aka Gopal Hari Das, guilty of conspiring to commit immigration fraud. Haldar identifies himself as the founder, president, CEO, and spiritual leader of Gaudiya Vaisnava Society (GVS), a religious temple located at 2425 W. Ramsey Ave. in Milwaukee.

According to evidence at trial, Haldar conspired to sponsor more than two dozen Indian nationals to enter the country under religious worker or "R-1" visas. Typically, the R-1 applications falsely stated that the individuals were religious workers from India who planned to be priests and perform religious work at the GVS temple in Milwaukee. In fact, the Indian nationals had no religious training or experience, and had no intention of being priests or performing religious work once they arrived in the United States.

Haldar was charged in June 2010 after ICE HSI agents arrested him at O'Hare International Airport in Chicago as he arrived in the United States from India. Searches of Haldar's luggage revealed that he was transporting identification documents – including passports and other Indian identification documents – bearing the names and photographs of other Indian nationals. The arrest was the culmination of a lengthy investigation into Haldar and GVS.

The investigation into Haldar began in June 2008 after ICE HSI received information from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' (USCIS) Benefit Fraud Unit that GVS had filed numerous petitions for R-1 religious workers from India. Subsequent ICE HSI investigation revealed that Haldar used the GVS temple as a front for an elaborate religious visa fraud scheme.

In the scheme, Haldar charged Indian nationals as much as \$30,000 each in exchange for his assistance in fraudulently obtaining R-1 visas. The fraudulent priests typically made substantial cash payments to Haldar and his associates in India, and were indebted to Haldar for the balance once they arrived in the United States. They worked at convenience stores and other Milwaukee-area locations, and paid Haldar from what they earned.

"We are extremely gratified with the jury's guilty verdict in this case," said Gary Hartwig, special agent in charge of ICE's Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) in Chicago. "Visa fraud represents a vulnerability that could be exploited by criminals or others who wish to do us harm. HSI will continue to aggressively investigate individuals and organizations that seek to corrupt and exploit our nation's immigration system."

ICE HSI was assisted in the investigation by USCIS. First Assistant U.S. Attorney Gregory J. Haanstad, Eastern District of Wisconsin, prosecuted this case. Sentencing is scheduled for Feb. 24.