

Plant nursery director who took \$143,000 in bribes jailed for 8 months

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SINGAPORE - Saddled with credit card debts amounting to \$100,000, the head of a landscaping and plant nursery company came up with a plan to obtain the money.

He told a supplier that he would continue to give him business in return for money.

The supplier gave a total of \$143,000 in kickbacks on eight occasions between Nov 2008 and Dec 2010.

On Tuesday (March 29), Geow Chwee Hiam, 66, was jailed for eight months for taking the bribes, having pleaded guilty earlier to three charges of graft.

Another five corruption charges were taken into consideration during sentencing.

A district court heard that Geow started work as a site supervisor with Island Landscape & Nursery in 1976, and became its director in 1995. The company sells and rents horticulture plants for display. It is a subsidiary of Island Horti-Tech Group.

In June 2009, the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau got a tip-off that Geow was taking bribes from Island Landscape's suppliers.

But investigations took time, and officers interviewed him only in Jan 2011.

Geow admitted to investigators that he had taken kickbacks from Mr Loo Nee Soon, the managing director of Sinflora, which supplies retail and imported plants to Island Landscape.

Geow said he had accumulated credit card debts and had asked Mr Loo for money.

In return, Geow said he chose Sinflora as Island Landscape's supplier, although its prices were higher than other suppliers, and even though it was cheaper to import some plants directly from the source country.

Sinflora received about \$380,000 a year in business from Island Landscape in 2009 and 2010.

Geow could have been jailed for five years and fined \$100,000 on each corruption charge.