

Court confiscates S\$2.6m in ill-gotten gains from convicted football match-fixer

BT EXCLUSIVE

State agencies go after proceeds from crime so offenders will not enjoy them upon release from jail

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THOSE involved in bribery be warned: whether a giver or a taker, bribery is a crime that Singapore takes so seriously that even after an offender has served time in jail, authorities can strip ill-gotten gains to ensure that the offender does not enjoy them upon release.

In the case of bribery, the State typically disgorges illegal benefits from bribe receivers.

But in a rare move on May 3, on the application of the public prosecutor, the Singapore High Court issued a confiscation order for S\$3.4 million in concealed income from a bribe giver, Eric Ding – a match-fixer who contributed to giving Singapore the insalubrious reputation as a haven for match-fixers.

Ding was recently released from jail after serving five years for providing three FIFA-accredited Lebanese football officials with prostitutes as bribes for rigging future matches.

CPIB had used the Corruption, Drug Trafficking and other Serious Crimes (Confiscation of Benefits) Act (Cap 65A) (CDSA) – along with its provision for the confiscation of benefits – to come down hard on the bribe giver.

“We are sending a signal to the in-

ternational community of match-fixers and say, look we are prepared to deal with such criminals. You can end up serving jail term but we will also tackle the illegal proceeds. Offenders must be prepared to face the full force of law,” said CPIB, adding that Singapore is one of the very few countries that act against match-fixers.

The night before Ding was scheduled to fix a match in Singapore, he had arranged “entertainment” for three Lebanese football officials. He sent prostitutes to the Amara Hotel along Tanjong Pagar Road where the Lebanese officials were staying. All were nabbed in the act. The case was proven in court and those involved were charged in April 2013 and convicted.

CPIB’s tenacity as anti-corruption fighter went beyond the offence. Two days after Ding was charged, CPIB opened a full financial investigation on April 8, 2013, to investigate the gaping difference between the amount of money he had and what he earned from his pubs and other investments, with the intention of stripping all illegal benefits.

The financial audit on Ding was laborious and took six years to complete. Investigators looked at assets accumulated over six years up to April 2013, from 2007 when bank records were available. These included bank balances, property, investments and vehicles. Liabilities were also scrutinised.

CPIB officers interviewed almost 120 people and screened over 160 banks, including local banks and offshore banks operating here. A lot of effort was made to link people with dealings with Ding and to identify prox-



High Court issues confiscation order for S\$3.4m from Eric Ding, but S\$2.6m was recovered as the rest had been spent or lost through assets depreciation. FILE PHOTO

ies. There were claims to assets even though they appeared to be held in proxy for Ding. Ding made claims to some assets on behalf of his family members. Eventually, CPIB resolved for some assets to be released to his family members, giving him the benefit of doubt.

At the end of the financial profiling, investigators determined the change in net worth was S\$2.2 million. Ding had incurred expenditure of about S\$4 million. So his income to support his wealth accumulation and expenditure should be S\$6.2 million. But known sources of income, including casino winnings and winnings from Singapore Pools added up to only S\$2.7 million. There was S\$3.4 million to S\$3.5 million in concealed income, or disproportionate wealth, deemed to be derived from illegal

sources accumulated over six years prior to his arrest. Further efforts were made to ensure the findings were “fair and reasonable”. An independent accountant was roped in.

In June 2017, the independent accountant confirmed CPIB’s work is fair and reasonable. Ding was served the confiscation bundle, which he challenged. CPIB took another year and half to check and validate what he said, and by May 2, 2019, Ding finally agreed with CPIB’s assessment.

On May 3, the court made the confiscation order for S\$3.4 million being Ding’s disproportionate wealth and being deemed criminal benefits and S\$2.6 million to be recovered. The recovery sum was lower as part of the criminal benefits was dissipated because Ding had spent some over the six years plus certain assets like cars had depreciated in value.

Singapore had seen cases where the State has seized assets of criminals. In 2011, the State seized S\$23 million in assets from rogue tycoon, Ng Teck Lee, in what is believed to be the largest confiscation order in recent times. Ng carried out the US\$51 million fraud in 2003 and 2004 while he was president of recycling firm, Citiraya Industries. When his clients gave him 62 shipments of used computer chips to dispose of, he repackaged them and sold them to buyers in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Ng is not the only criminal who has been stripped of millions of dollars by the State.

In 2000, Singapore Airlines clerk Teo Cheng Kiat had assets worth about \$22 million seized after he was handed a 24-year jail sentence for stealing around S\$35 million from his employer over several years.