

Ex-NLB manager admits to graft involving \$600k

He obtained kickbacks from a director of three firms to advance his business interests with NLB

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Court Correspondent

A former manager of a National Library Board (NLB) department set up to spearhead its move into e-books and other digital resources has admitted to graft offences involving nearly \$600,000.

Ivan Koh Siong Wee, 50, had obtained the monies from a director of three firms, Low Pok Woen, 51, in exchange for advancing the latter's business interests with NLB.

Yesterday, each man pleaded guilty to 20 counts of corruption involving nearly \$500,000. Another



Ivan Koh Siong Wee (far left) and Low Pok Woen each pleaded guilty to 20 counts of corruption involving nearly \$500,000. Another 36 similar charges linked to the remaining amount will be taken into consideration.
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WONG KWAI CHOW

36 similar charges linked to the remaining amount will be taken into consideration. The two Singaporeans committed the offences between 2005 and 2009.

The court heard that besides working as a manager at NLB's Digital Resource Services Department, Koh also headed a company known as Speedcuts, which provided hair-cutting services. Low was one of its employees between 2001 and 2005.

Deputy Public Prosecutors Suhas Malhotra, Magdalene Huang and Andre Ong stated in court documents that some time around 2004 or 2005, there was a "strategic move" within NLB towards digitalisation.

They added: "Digitalisation refers to maintaining of informative digital databases, procuring of electronic resources such as e-books and e-comics and microfilm-

ing of old books. The digital databases, e-books and e-comics maintained by NLB can be accessed online by NLB members."

NLB's Digital Resource Services Department was then formed to champion this move. Koh had shared news about NLB's move towards digitalisation with Low.

He also said Low could explore a business opportunity in providing digital content to NLB.

In November 2005, Low incorporated a firm known as Database Resource Services to provide this service to NLB. He later set up two more, JCD Crossmedia and W3.XS.

The prosecutors said that Koh was appointed as a manager of NLB's Digital Resource Services Department in 2005, making him the second in command there.

In November that year, he started asking Low for money for various personal purposes. Low then set

aside about 30 per cent of all the profits earned from his three firms' subscription contracts with NLB to be given as bribes to Koh.

In return, Koh helped advance Low's business interests with NLB in various ways. For instance, Koh shared confidential information with Low on the digital resources that NLB was interested in.

The DPPs stated: "With this information, Low could... source the market selectively and supply those resources to NLB when the opportunity came."

Koh also advised Low on what prices to quote NLB, the court heard.

The offences came to light after NLB lodged a police report on Feb 21, 2014.

Low and Koh were each offered bail of \$80,000 yesterday. Their cases have been adjourned to Sept 15.

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