

Former senior director of NParks jailed 4 months for corruption

Between 2018 and 2020, a former senior director at the National Parks Board (NParks) would get free lifts to and from Singapore and Johor Baru in exchange for giving business to a grass-cutting company contracted by NParks.

Yesterday, Teva Raj Palanisamy, 70, was sentenced to four months' imprisonment and ordered to pay a penalty of \$900 for corruption.

One other charge of accepting a hotel stay in Macau in 2018 from another contractor, Ho Eng Huat Construction (HEHC), was taken into account in his sentencing.

Teva Raj worked in the Municipal Landscapes Division which maintains the greenery on government land by contracting private companies for these services.

In exchange for being more lenient with breaches, where a penalty could be imposed on the contracted company, Teva Raj accepted six round trips across the Causeway from grass-cutting and greenery company Soon Sin Contracts' director Ong Eng Soon.

Mr Ong was also a GrabHitch driver and would usually charge

\$150 for each round trip from Singapore to Malaysia.

The court heard that between August 2018 and March 2020, the six trips to and from Johor Baru were for a function, a meeting, a dinner party, a visit to Teva Raj's brother with his family, and two visits to a law firm to attend to a personal matter. Two trips involved Teva Raj being picked up from his office at 1 Cluny Road.

He did not offer to pay Mr Ong for the services, nor did Mr Ong ask for payment, said Deputy Public Prosecutor Victoria Ting.

Another NParks officer, Mr



Teva Raj Palanisamy, 70, was also ordered to pay a penalty of \$900.

Johnny Go, director at the division at the time, joined Teva Raj on two occasions.

He has been issued a stern warning, while Mr Ong was given a conditional warning.

Some time in 2019, HEHC was experiencing manpower delays and Teva Raj suggested to HEHC to get Soon Sin to step in as a sub-contractor. Soon Sin took over HEHC's works for a period of three months.

Teva Raj also instructed NParks staff not to issue any notice of infringements to HEHC as this would cause disruption to the works.

Teva Raj's lawyer, Mr Bernard Sahagar, told the court that NParks had become his client's "family and passion". Teva Raj started working there in 1980.

He argued that Mr Ong and Teva Raj were close friends and, in retrospect, Teva Raj should have been more careful with his interactions.

Mr Ong told Teva Raj he made frequent trips to Malaysia and Teva Raj asked if he could go with him, said Mr Sahagar. The lawyer added that Teva Raj accepts that Mr Ong felt obligated to say yes to him.

Mr Sahagar told the court that Teva Raj's wife, a Malaysian, died in 2016 and he was primarily making the trips to Malaysia to settle matters involving her will.

For corruption, Teva Raj could have been fined up to \$100,000, jailed for up to seven years or both.

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