

SINGAPORE

8.7kg
AMOUNT OF CANNABIS
SEIZED IN DRUG BUST | B6

Key player in \$128m oil heist gets 29 years' jail

Judge says his offences hit at the heart of the bunkering and petrochemical industry here

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One of the masterminds of a massive conspiracy to misappropriate gas oil from Shell Eastern Petroleum's Pulau Bukom facility was yesterday sentenced to 29 years' jail, one of the longest prison terms for a commercial crime.

Juandi Pungot, 45, who began embezzling the marine fuel from his former employer in 2007, in February admitted to misappropriating 203,403 tonnes of gas oil worth \$128 million.

In sentencing him yesterday, High Court judge Hoo Sheau Peng said the offences hit at the heart of the bunkering and petrochemical industry, which is a pillar of Singapore's economy.

"The massive scale of offending is unprecedented. The length of offending is substantial. A sophisticated syndicate was involved. For-

eign buyers were involved," she said.

Juandi is the first of three key players to be dealt with for his role in the conspiracy, which went on between 2007 and 2018, to illegally transfer gas oil out of the facility onto various vessels.

"The offences were premeditated, planned and sophisticated in nature. Exploiting their in-depth knowledge of Shell's systems, the accused and the co-conspirators were able to conceal their offending for a prolonged period of time," Justice Hoo noted.

The steps included configuring the flow of gas oil to avoid routes with custody transfer meters. This demonstrated a deviousness in evading detection, said the judge.

"Their efforts to cover their tracks clearly paid off as Shell had to invest a significant amount of effort to uncover the unexplained oil losses," she added.

In February, Juandi pleaded guilty to 20 charges of criminal



Juandi Pungot is the first of three key players to be dealt with for his role in the conspiracy, which went on between 2007 and 2018, to illegally transfer gas oil out of Shell Eastern Petroleum's Pulau Bukom facility. ST PHOTO: KELVIN CHNG

breach of trust.

These charges involved eight co-conspirators, his colleagues at the time, who have been charged.

They are shore loading officers Muzaffar Ali Khan, Koh Choon Wei and Tiah Kok Hwee; process technicians Cai Zhizhong, Muhammad Ashraf Hamzah, Muhammad Farhan Mohamed Rashid and Sadagopan Premnath; and blending specialist Quek Rong Hong.

Three have been convicted for their respective roles. Ashraf was sentenced to 9½ years' jail, Sadagopan was sentenced to six years and eight months' jail, while Farhan is awaiting sentencing.

Others who have also pleaded guilty include Nguyen Duc Quang, Doan Xuan Than, Dang Van Hanh and Pham Van Ban, who were captains or crew members from foreign vessels.

Juandi also pleaded guilty to six corruption charges for bribing six independent surveyors to turn a blind eye to the misappropriation, and 10 charges for laundering his ill-gotten gains.

Another 49 similar charges were taken into consideration during sentencing.

Juandi obtained at least \$5.6 million in criminal proceeds, which he spent on designer watches, cars –

including a Mercedes-Benz GLC 250 – a unit at Regentville condominium in Hougang, and properties in Bangkok and Batam.

He also went gambling with his ill-gotten gains, converting more than \$550,000 into casino chips at Marina Bay Sands on 175 occasions between 2012 and 2016.

He and his co-conspirators invested in a restaurant called The 3 Amigos in Singapore and a restaurant in Johor Baru.

Juandi first became involved in the misappropriation of gas oil in 2007, along with his colleague Abdul Latif Ibrahim. Latif has been charged with other individuals arising out of the broader investigation into the embezzled oil.

More co-conspirators were recruited and the criminal enterprise was expanded to involve more bunker ships.

Muzaffar, the alleged third key player, was recruited some time between end-2007 and early 2008.

Generally, to broker a deal to sell misappropriated gas oil, a shore loading officer of the syndicate engaged with the captain of a vessel to discuss the sale and purchase of the gas oil. The misappropriated gas oil was sold at a price lower than its prevailing market value.

After Latif left the group following a falling-out over the proceeds, they took a hiatus but resumed their illicit activities in 2014.

In early 2015, Shell began observing significant unidentified oil loss at Pulau Bukom. After multiple investigations, it made a police report on Aug 1, 2017. Juandi tendered his resignation in December that year, after he heard rumours of a police investigation.

However, he continued to be involved in the collection and distribution of proceeds from the misappropriation of gas oil.

Juandi was arrested on Jan 7, 2018, before he collected the proceeds from an illegal loading.