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60-week jail for ex-Citi exec who can't pay fine

■ BY ESTHER TAN

A FORMER Citibank branch manager is serving a 60-week jail term, after being found guilty of 20 charges of extracting confidential information from the bank's computer database and abetting his subordinates to do the same.

Jonathan Seah Thiam Heng, 48, who was unable to do pay the \$160,000 fine imposed yesterday, is the sixth Citibank employee to be convicted of pilfering bank information in 2006.

His three subordinates, Esther Lim Siew May, 32, Koh Meng Yang, 29, and Jelene Lee Kit Peng, 35, who were also involved, were fined between \$70,000 and \$160,000.

Another two Citibank employees already dealt with are former vice-president Carel Low Siok

Liang, 34, who was fined \$173,000 on 22 charges in January, and her personal assistant Valarie Lim Ming Huey, 31, who was fined \$40,000 in April on six charges.

The court heard that even before Seah had accepted a position in rival bank UBS in May 2006, he was already forwarding files containing confidential customer information and bank details to his personal e-mail account and to his subordinates.

Seah, who was then a branch banking manager of Citigold in Orchard Road, was aware that he was not authorised to send the information to his own e-mail account as it was not for genuine work purposes.

His subordinates accepted job offers, also with UBS, between May and June 2006, to join Seah

as client advisers on his team there.

But in July 2006, after their ruse came to light, Citibank terminated Lee's employment and converted the resignations of Lim and Koh to a termination of their services. The trio and Seah were required by UBS to go on leave after Citibank took legal action against them.

In a written mitigation submitted to the court, Seah's lawyer Lee Teck Leng asked for a fine to be imposed on his client. He said that his client did not realise it was an offence to take the information and little damage was done to Citibank as the information obtained was not used.

Mr Lee pointed out that as a result of the media publicity given to the case, Seah's career in the banking industry has "effectively been destroyed".

"The destruction of his career in the financial sector is a very serious blow to his livelihood," he said. Seah could have been fined up to \$100,000 or jailed for up to 20 years, or both fined and jailed, on each charge.