

Man jailed a year for role in phone lottery scam

BY KHUSHWANT SINGH

A 28-YEAR-OLD jobless man who allowed his bank account to be used by a syndicate running a phone lottery scam was yesterday jailed a year.

Ong Tian Soon, who pleaded guilty, was offered \$150 a month to turn his POSB Bank account into a conduit for the transfer and withdrawal of criminal proceeds.

He had earned this "fee" just once when he was nabbed.

The court heard that a man identified only as Xiao Zhang approached him in Geylang last August.

The man offered Ong money for every bank account that could be used by his syndicate to collect payment from punters placing illegal online bets on games such as soccer.

At least, that was what Ong was told. His account came to be used instead to receive money from victims of a phone lottery scam.

Victims of such scams are told in phone calls that they have won "lottery prizes". But to collect these, they must first transfer money for "taxes" or "administration fees" into a bank account.

Between Aug 31 and Sept 22, Xiao Zhang withdrew \$8,340 that had been deposited into Ong's account.

In September, Xiao Zhang also talked Ong into opening an account with OCBC Bank for the same purpose.

Officers of the Commercial Affairs Department got wind of this and closed in just as Ong and another man, Leung Shun Kit, were about to withdraw \$4,000 from the OCBC Geylang branch.

Leung has not yet been dealt with and no mention was made in court about who and where Xiao Zhang is.

Police prosecutor Sheik Allaudeen, noting The Straits Times had last month reported a rise in phone scams in which victims were conned of \$4 million last year, said it was extremely difficult to catch offenders.

Ong asked for leniency, saying he committed the offences in the hope of getting out of debt, but District Judge Toh Yung Cheong noted that Ong had committed the offences while on police bail for cheating.

He had collected \$3,200 as deposit from a woman who wanted to rent his Toa Payoh flat, but leased the flat to somebody else instead. For that, Ong earned an additional two months in jail.

For allowing his bank account to be used by criminals, he could have been jailed up to seven years and fined up to \$500,000.