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Man working for illegal money changer gets jail for snatching S\$30,000 from client at Jurong Point mall



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Published May 29, 2023

Updated May 30, 2023



Nuria Ling/TODAY

Zhang Kexi at the State Courts on May 29, 2023.

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- Zhang Kexi, 33, pleaded guilty to one count of theft and one count of helping to carry out duties for an unlicensed payment service

his designated Chinese bank account

- During a tussle at a Subway outlet at Jurong Point shopping centre, Zhang snatched S\$30,000 from the client
- Zhang was sentenced to four months' jail

SINGAPORE — A man working for an illegal money changer snatched S\$30,000 from an unhappy client as he was being pinned down by an accomplice at Jurong Point shopping centre after his boss said to get the cash "by hook or by crook".

Zhang Kexi and several others allegedly took their instructions from a man called Tan Zhixian, who was providing an unlicensed money-changing service that was advertised through Telegram and WeChat.

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Zhang, a 33-year-old Chinese national, pleaded guilty on Monday (May 29) to one count of theft as well as one count of helping to carry out a payment service without a licence. He was sentenced to four months' jail.

Three other similar charges were also taken into consideration during sentencing.

WHAT HAPPENED

Investigations revealed that on or before Jan 17, 2022, a WeChat conversation took place between Zhang Kexi and a client named Mr Zhang Renfei who had asked to exchange S\$100,000 with its equivalent in yuan.

An agreement was struck to change the money at the rate of S\$1 to 4.8 yuan. Mr Zhang Renfei would get 480,000 yuan in his designated account in China upon paying the outfit S\$100,000.

Zhang Kexi had allegedly notified Tan of the deal and was told that since it involved a large sum, they would first have to see the amount presented by Mr Zhang Renfei before the transfer could be made, Deputy Public Prosecutor (DPP) Jonathan Tan said.

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The initial plan was for Tan to remit 115,000 yuan to Mr Zhang Renfei's bank account and to collect S\$24,109 from him.

The initial arrangement was for Zhang Kexi and two other individuals to meet Mr Zhang Renfei in the vicinity of Block 687 in Jurong West, where he would hand over the cash after receiving the yuan transfer.

However, Mr Zhang Renfei was hesitant in meeting them as he was alone and holding a large sum of money.

Zhang Kexi told his two accomplices to meet with Mr Zhang Renfei inside Jurong Point shopping centre to take him to their agreed location. But when they met, Mr Zhang Renfei refused to leave the mall out of fear for his safety.

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At this time, Tan told Zhang Kexi that a partial transfer of 115,000 yuan had been made as per the plan. But when told of this, Mr Zhang Renfei refused to hand over any cash as he denied receiving the transfer.

Zhang Kexi called Tan after the other man kept refusing to hand over the money.

GET CASH 'BY HOOK OR BY CROOK', BOSS SAID

Tan insisted that the first partial transfer had been made and allegedly instructed Zhang Kexi to obtain the equivalent sum of S\$24,109 in cash "by hook or by crook", or else the latter would have to bear personal responsibility for any losses sustained.

Mr Zhang Renfei then took refuge at a Subway outlet on the first floor of Jurong Point shopping centre and called the police for assistance.

Zhang Kexi and another man, Chen Suo, followed soon after and a struggle ensued.

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A short video clip was played in court which showed the moment Mr Zhang Renfei was tackled to the floor and [pinned down by Chen](#) as Zhang Kexi snatched a handful of money from the man's paper bag before running out of the outlet.

DPP Tan said that after the incident, in addition to remitting S\$4,000 back to China, Zhang Kexi had also gone for a meal and a massage, which were paid for using the money that he had snatched from Mr Zhang Renfei earlier in the day.

Zhang Kexi was arrested on Jan 19, 2022.

Speaking on behalf of Zhang Kexi, defence lawyer **Mohd Arshad of Fernandez LLC** urged the court to consider imposing the lower end of the prosecution's proposed four to five months' jail sentence as he has been "out of a job for a year" and is trying to look after his children and elderly parents.

The lawyer asked District Judge Wong Peck to consider a four-month jail term as Zhang Kexi had ultimately acted because of the alleged threat from Tan.

Anyone found guilty of theft can be jailed for up to three years or fined, or both.

Those guilty of providing any type of unlicensed payment service in Singapore can be jailed for up to three years, fined up to S\$125,000, or both.

In April, [Chen was sentenced](#) to three months' jail. Tan has yet to face the court.

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