

THE STRAITS TIMES

Teen in \$48,000 armed robbery in Jurong gets reformatory training



Kotta Kumar Jeswanth is one of the four who were accused of robbing OT Credit at Block 135 Jurong Gateway of \$48,000 in cash on Nov 19, 2020. ST PHOTO: JEAN IAU



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SINGAPORE - A teenager, who had earlier committed a range of offences including assault, was awaiting his probation suitability report when he returned to a life of crime.

He committed armed robbery at a licensed money lending firm in Jurong last November.

Kotta Kumar Jeswanth, now 19, was sentenced on Thursday (Feb 18) to undergo reformatory training for a minimum of one year.

This means that he will be detained in a centre and made to follow a strict regimen that includes foot drills and counselling.

He pleaded guilty in January to his latest offences including armed robbery and wrongfully restraining a woman while committing the crime.

The cases involving three other men, who are allegedly linked to the robbery, are still pending.

They are: Karrtik Stalniraj and Tusheintar Segaran, both 22, and Arunasalam Kannan, 27.



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Before committing the heist, Kotta admitted on Oct 19 last year to one count each of assault, unlawfully meeting others for a social purpose amid the Covid-19 outbreak, and disturbing the peace by fighting in a public place.

The court then called for a report to assess his suitability for probation and he was slated to be sentenced on Nov 30 last year.

Instead of staying out of trouble, he committed armed robbery with two of his alleged accomplices earlier that month.

Deputy Public Prosecutor Chong Yonghui said that Kotta met up with Karrtik and Tusheintar near OT Credit at Block 135 Jurong Gateway Road at around noon on Nov 19 last year. Ms Candy Yang was the sole OT Credit employee present at the time.

The DPP added: "Inside the shop, the accused accosted the victim by pulling her hair using his left hand and holding a karambit knife in his right hand.

"The accused told the victim not to shout and demanded that she throw cash into a grey haversack which he was carrying in front of his body. The victim was afraid for her safety and complied out of fear."

In the meantime, the court heard that Karrtik searched the premises for more cash while Tusheintar acted as a lookout.

Ms Yang then put money into Kotta's haversack. Subsequently, he took her to the back of the shop and locked her inside a back office.



Karambit knives used in the robbery, as well as cash and some of the items believed to have been bought using the stolen cash, that were seized by police during the arrests. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

The trio fled the scene with \$48,000 in cash.

The DPP said that the men later met up with Arunasalam at a Lim Chu Kang cemetery to split their ill-gotten gains.

Kotta, who received \$14,000, handed \$8,000 to Arunasalam before telling the older man to pass the cash to his family and girlfriend.

Kotta also passed the knife and haversack to Arunasalam and told him to get rid of them.

Kotta was wearing an electronic tag, a device used to monitor criminal offenders, when he committed the robbery.

At around 4.20pm, he removed the device from his body, causing \$500 in damage.

The court heard that closed-circuit television footage showed the trio committing the heist and police later arrested the offenders.

Kotta was represented by lawyers **Patrick Fernandez** and Cheryl Tan.

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On Thursday, they told the court that their client is remorseful, adding: "Kotta was not the mastermind of the armed robbery... Rather, (he) was influenced by friends who suggested committing robbery to resolve their financial problems."

For armed robbery, an offender can be jailed for between five and 20 years and receive at least 12 strokes of the cane.

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