

Name: Alert ID: TMML2024037926689 SINGAPORE: After her husband was hauled to court for giving illegal loans to borrowers including a client of hers, a property agent bribed her client to give a false statement for her husband's trial. When she was nabbed and given her own charges for witness tampering, the woman absconded in the midst of her trial and fled to Malaysia on the pretext of attending to work-related matters. Sally Lai Guek Ling, 45, returned to Singapore about a year later and turned herself in. She was sentenced on Friday (Oct 30) to two years' jail and fined S\$78,000. As she cannot pay the fine, she will serve another three months' jail in default. Lai pleaded guilty to four charges of instigating a witness to make a false declaration for use in the trial against her husband, offering this witness a bribe, conspiring with her husband to carry on a business of unlicensed moneylending and absconding from her trial. Another four charges were taken into consideration. The court heard that Lai was hired as a property agent for Salinah Ahmad and Sazali Ramli to assist in the sale of their flat in 2012. The couple was facing financial difficulties and had spoken to Lai about their problems. Lai later introduced Salinah to Lai's husband, Kenny Tay Ann Siang, 46. Lai said her husband could give Salinah a loan, to be repaid with the proceeds from the sale of her flat, without indicating the interest rate. The couple agreed to the proposal as they needed cash, and Salinah borrowed S\$30,000 from Tay over a few months even though Tay and Lai were not authorised to carry on a moneylending business. In August 2012, Lai sold Salinah's flat for about S\$270,000, but claimed about S\$108,000 from the sales proceeds as repayment of the loan, with an interest rate of about 260 per cent. In 2014, a senior manager with the Council of Estate Agencies lodged a police report in relation to the sale of Salinah's flat on suspicion of illegal moneylending activities by Lai. The police investigated Lai and her husband, and Tay was arrested and later charged for unlicensed moneylending offences including the loan extended to Salinah. HER HUSBAND CLAIMED TRIAL Tay said he would claim trial and trial dates were fixed, but his wife contacted Salinah in March 2015 to say she needed Salinah's help for the trial. This was despite knowing that Salinah would be called as a witness in Tay's trial. Between June and July 2015, Lai promised Salinah S\$3,000 if she agreed to provide false testimony in Tay's trial, to exculpate him from the offences, and Salinah agreed. Lai prepared a false declaration and Salinah signed it. However, her criminal acts were uncovered and Lai was charged in April 2017 for bribing witnesses. Lai claimed trial to her offences and the trial began in June 2018. On the 13th day of her trial, she asked to leave Singapore to attend to work-related matters in Malaysia. The judge granted this request, but Lai absconded and did not return to court for her trial on Dec 19, 2018. A warrant of arrest was issued against her, and she surrendered herself to the court in January this year. Deputy Public Prosecutor Chong Yonghui asked for 27 months' jail and a fine of S\$78,000, in default three months' jail. He highlighted that while Lai pleaded guilty, this was after she absconded in the middle of her trial. SHE HAS SUFFERED FROM DEPRESSION FOR ALMOST 20 YEARS: DEFENCE Defence lawyer Thong Chee Kun from Rajah & Tann asked for no more than 18 months' jail, saying that Lai's mental condition was a central theme of her mitigation. "She has suffered from depression for almost 20 years," said Mr Thong. "She was affected by her depression and her concern for her family. "Based on 20 years of major depression she suffered, a lot of her actions were affected by the way she thought about the whole matter, by her desire to protect her family." He highlighted that Lai ultimately "made the difficult decision to surrender herself voluntarily". "Against the backdrop of her mental condition, one can imagine the anguish and the suffering she had to go through while on the run. It was not an easy period for her, especially since she was separated from her children at the time," said the lawyer. He said that while there was another lawyer representing Lai, Mr Thong and his colleague had represented Lai during her trial and was "doing this at extremely low cost to help her complete the matter". He urged the court to impose a lenient in-default sentence as Lai cannot afford any fine. "She looks forward to being reunited with her children ... and she wishes to start her life anew as soon as possible. She's also instructed us to apologise to the court and the prosecution for all the problems she has caused," said Mr Thong. District Judge John Ng said: "Madam Lai, I think the moment you stopped running, the moment you came back, you already started ... towards the road to recovering your life." He said she should be able to put this behind her within the year, as her jail term will be backdated to the date of her remand in January. "You should be able to put this behind you, and as you wish, to look after your children and focus on them. Then please make your life in order after that," said the judge. The trial for Lai's husband is still pending.