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Ex-Customs officer jailed 5 years for aiding GST fraud at airport

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THE courts will come down hard on public servants who betray the trust placed in them and allow themselves to be corrupted.

District Judge Lim Tse Haw made this clear yesterday when he jailed Mohamed Yusof Abdul Rahman for five years for aiding four Indian nationals to commit goods and services tax (GST) fraud and for corruption.

The 67-year-old was working at Changi Airport's Goods and Services Tax Refund Inspection Counter when he accepted bribes of between \$100 and \$1,000 from three of the men in return for endorsing their GST Electronic Tourist Refund Scheme (eTRS) tickets to help them claim fraudulent refunds.

The judge said the total amount of tax evaded – almost

half a million dollars – was staggering.

He ordered Yusof to pay a penalty of \$11,400 for corruption and another \$661,685 – three times the tax defrauded.

The grandfather of four had faced 103 charges of tax evasion and 33 bribery offences. He admitted to seven corruption charges and 25 of evading GST of \$220,562.

Deputy Public Prosecutor Asoka Markandu said the offences occurred for about a year after Yusof was recruited by co-accused Sundar Panneer Selvam, 46, as a member of his criminal scheme.

Yusof accepted the bribes, mostly from Sundar, in exchange for not conducting proper checks on the jewellery presented to him.

DPP Markandu described the case as the "most elaborate, sophisticated and premeditated GST fraud case" since the

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eTRS scheme began in August 2012.

He added: "There is a strong public interest in ensuring that people who deliberately evade tax are dealt with severely so as to ensure that the proper administration of the Government is not compromised by tax leakages in the system."

In his brief oral grounds, Judge Lim said the main aggravating factor was the fact that Yusof had betrayed the trust placed in him by the Customs authority.

"It was a complete dereliction of duty," he said. "Without his complicity in the fraud, it would be very difficult for (Sundar) and the other accomplices to pull off this fraud at such a large scale."

Sundar and the other three Indian nationals have been jailed for three to four years and ordered to pay penalties.

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