

A shark's tale: How Ah Long San rose to the top

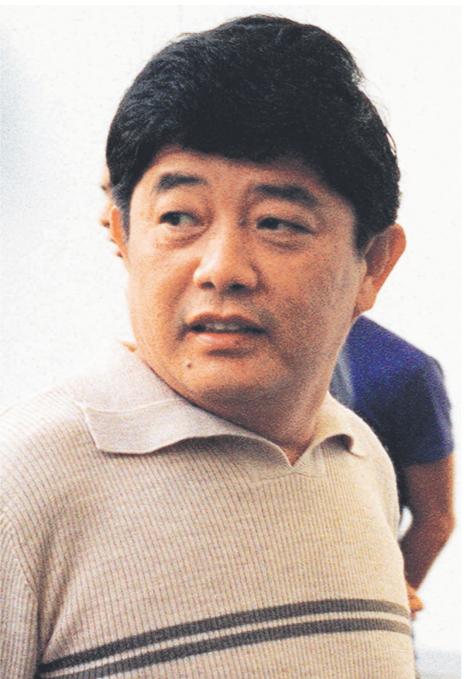
Book by CPIB reveals how feared criminal got cops on his payroll

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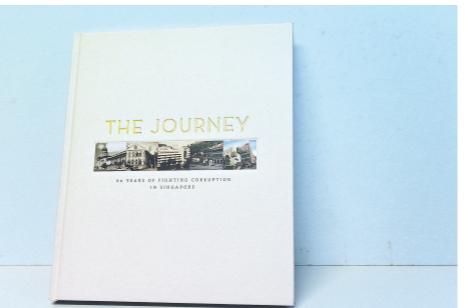
NOTORIOUS loan shark Ah Long San's driver was sworn to secrecy. But the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) needed Ah Gee's help to track down the wanted criminal.

Several investigators had tried to speak to the chauffeur, but he refused to reveal any information about his employer.

In the end, a resourceful CPIB officer, Deputy Director Teng Khee Fatt, spoke to Ah Gee and gained his trust.



PICTURE: ST FILE



18 CASES: (Above) To celebrate its 60th anniversary, CPIB launched a book titled *The Journey – 60 Years of Fighting Corruption in Singapore*. The book features many high-profile cases, including that of feared criminal Ah Long San (left).

Moved after being called a "good man" by the officer, Ah Gee finally gave the CPIB details that helped force Ah Long San's hand.

The case involving Ah Long San is one of 18 cases highlighted in CPIB's coffee table book titled *The Journey – 60 Years of Fighting Corruption in Singapore*.

The 120-page publication was launched yesterday on the bureau's 60th anniversary commemorative ceremony.

Besides the Ah Long San case, other high-profile cases involving offenders from all walks of life are also included, such as former ministers, policemen, football players and senior executives of companies.

Feared criminal

Ah Long San was an infamous moneylender and criminal in the 1990s.

He owned a number of legitimate businesses like karaoke pubs, but he was also involved in illegal moneylending.

Despite being a feared criminal, he was not caught for a long time.

That was because those who had information about him preferred to keep mum, fearing for their safety and the safety of their loved ones.

And Ah Long San had moles within the police force who tipped him off to raids.

In all, he managed to bribe nine crooked cops, all of whom ended up behind bars.

The highest ranking was a former assistant superintendent of police, who was 29 years old when he was jailed 18 months on Jan 11, 2000.

The former cop, who used to work as an air steward, first met the loan shark at a 24-hour Geylang food stall in 1994.

Ah Long San later became aware of the younger man's desire to join the police force and encouraged him to do so.

He also sponsored the ex-policeman's education in law.

Before he joined the police force in October 1997, the former cop had accepted various sums of money from Ah Long San.

This included a \$20,000 advance in 1995 to complete his law studies in Britain after he failed his second-year external law examination here.



60 YEARS: (From left) Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong chatting with two former CPIB directors, Mr Soh Kee Hean and Mr Chua Cher Yak, current CPIB director Eric Tan and former CPIB director Evan Yeo at the Istana yesterday.

PICTURE: THE STRAITS TIMES

The younger man remained in close contact with the loan shark through the years.

It was the former cop who introduced his other colleagues to Ah Long San.

The ex-policeman was convicted on four corruption charges – for receiving three bribes of \$1,000 each and one of \$5,000 between November 1997 and January 1999.

He took the money and used his office and contacts to influence the outcome of investigations.

And when the loan shark's brother was arrested, Ah Long San used his moles in the police force to check on the status of the case.

The crooked cops were also told to treat Ah Long San's sibling nicely.

Ah Long San was later convicted and sentenced to 18 months' jail for bribing a then-police officer.

Knowing that he could be serving more jail time, he went into hiding after failing to appear in court when the appeal against his 18-month sentence was heard.

But The New Paper managed to score an exclusive interview with him in June 2001 while he was on the run.

Speaking to TNP then, he said: "My jail term is 18 months. But I still have several cases pending.... I will be in jail for a long time."

But he was arrested on July 9, 2001, after he surrendered to the authorities.

He was jailed for 10 years on Oct 4, 2001, when he was 45.

It was then the heaviest sentence meted out by the courts for graft.

AT THE LAUNCH

"It's far better to suffer the embarrassment and to keep the system clean for the long term than to pretend that nothing has gone wrong and to let the rot spread."

– Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong

"The latest cases are new forms of corruption, with sex being exchanged for favourable outcomes. There is no end to human ingenuity."

– Former prime minister Lee Kuan Yew

What it takes to be CPIB officer

CHIEF Special Investigator Osman Ahamed has been with the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) for 30 years.

He had many close friends when he was a football referee.

But they started to distance themselves from him when he joined the CPIB in 1982, he said in the book.

That was because they were afraid, as officers from the bureau have a reputation of "swiftly clamping down on any non-compliant behaviour".

But Mr Osman held on and later received an efficiency medal for his contribution to CPIB.

According to the book, which was launched yesterday, being a CPIB investigator is no walk in the park.

Candidates are assessed based on factors including their personality and family background.

On top of being street smart, they must be able to withstand the rigours of investigative work and operate at odd hours of the day.

They must also possess the self-discipline to complete a large amount of paperwork.

CPIB Director Eric Tan said the person has to be honest and be prepared to stand up for the truth.

"He or she must call a spade a spade."