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court over insurance monies

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THE STRAITS TIMES



Man accused of using fugitive lawyer's name to cheat 2 insurance firms out of nearly \$77,000



Headline in the Straits Times

The Straits Times reported on Wednesday, 9 August 2023 that Saha Ranjit Chandra, 48, has been

hauled to a district court on Tuesday after he allegedly used the name of a fugitive lawyer to dupe two insurance companies into disbursing nearly \$77,000 in settlement sums linked to two foreign workers' injury claims.

The [news story in the Straits Times](#) is behind a paywall.

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deceived the companies into believing that they were negotiating with an authorised person from Whitefield Law Corp under the Legal Profession Act, the police said in a statement.

The fugitive lawyer is Charles Yeo who faces charges of his own (unrelated to this matter) but fled Singapore in 2022. He was last reported to be in Britain where he said he was seeking asylum.

Ranjit is well known to many injured workers as a “lawyer”. He is not. More accurately, he may be described as an independent paralegal or freelance legal assistant specialising in injury cases. His clients are workers who think they need help over their work injury insurance claims. At the back end, he partners with licensed law firms to provide the cover for the kinds of things only lawyers are allowed to do, such as being the legal representative of a claimant vis-à-vis an insurer.

In this particular case alleged here, the Straits Times reported that Charles Yeo was a director of law firm Whitefield Law Corp at the time. TWC2 was aware that Ranjit worked closely with Whitefield during the years in question.

Providing more details, the newspaper, referring to Ranjit by his other name, Saha, wrote:

Saha was handed five charges on Tuesday, including two counts of cheating.

He is accused of cheating Great Eastern Life Assurance between July 29 and Nov 30, 2020, by using Yeo’s name to negotiate for the workplace injury claim of a foreign worker named Manbir Singh.

After that, Great Eastern Life Assurance allegedly released the worker’s settlement sum of \$35,000 to Whitefield Law Corp.

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The insurer released a settlement sum of nearly \$42,000 over the workplace injury claim of one Sikder Md Shalim.

From this amount, nearly \$32,600 was allegedly released to Whitefield Law Corp, while more than \$9,200 was said to be released to a company called Joseph Chen & Co.

Following that court appearance, the case was adjourned to 3 October 2023. The newspaper added that for each count of cheating, an offender can be jailed for up to ten years and fined.

The news story says that Ranjit, acting (whether properly or not – which is a matter before the courts) on behalf of Charles Yeo, the lawyer, allegedly got two insurance companies to transfer monies due to workers into law firms' accounts.

In the case of Manbir Singh, Great Eastern Life Assurance paid

- \$35,000 to Whitefield Law Corp.

In the case of Shikder Md Shalim, China Taiping Insurance (Singapore) paid

- \$32,600 to Whitefield Law Corp, and
- \$9,200 to another law firm Joseph Chen & Co.

Even though the monies were paid to the law firms by the insurers, allegedly on Ranjit's instructions, it does not necessarily mean they stayed in the law firms. Possibly we will learn in the trial where ultimately the amounts went.

Of the two insurance claims cited in the indictment, TWC2 is not familiar with the details of Manbir Singh's complaint, but Shikder Md Shalim had sought our help over the simple fact that none of the settlement amount was passed to him, and in fact both Charles Yeo and Ranjit refused to acknowledge him as their client. From our perspective, **the ultimate victim was the injured migrant worker, Shalim.**

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Co.? We shall soon find out when the trial begins, but based on what we know of Shalim's case, Ranjit was working under the cover of Joseph Chen & Co when that case began, later transferring it to Charles Yeo.

Ranjit used to be associated with lawyer Joseph Chen in earlier cases, then we heard that they had a falling out, which may be why Ranjit began channelling his worker cases through Charles Yeo's firm. Lately, however, we noticed that a new signboard bearing the name of Joseph Chen has been affixed to the front of the shophouse where Ranjit has his office (grandiosely called "Ranjit Centre"). They're back in bed together, it seems.



Countless such cases

Over a decade and a half, TWC2 has seen countless similar complaints and not just about Ranjit but other similar operators as well. Worker after worker have come to TWC2 telling us that they have not received the insurance payout for their disability, or they have suspicions that the amount paid to them was not correct. Such complaints are rarely associated with injury cases processed under the Work Injury Compensation Act (WICA). It is when a paralegal like Ranjit has advised or persuaded a worker to withdraw his case from WICA and re-file it as a common law claim in the courts that we tend to hear such complaints about accountability over monies.

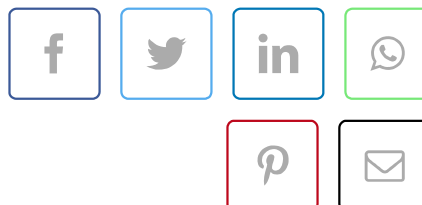
into common law, MUM is no longer involved. The worker's legal representative typically negotiates a settlement with the insurance company and the details of the negotiations and settlement remain confidential. An ethical lawyer would of course consult the client (worker) regularly and keep him informed.

However, when these independent paralegals or freelance legal assistants insert themselves into these cases and, under the cover of compliant law firms, make themselves the representatives of the law firms, who are officially the representatives of the worker, what ethical rules bind these non-lawyers? All too often TWC2 has had workers come tell us that their "lawyer" (i.e. the freelance paralegal) has told them nothing about whatever settlement had been reached with the insurer. They either got no money, or even if they did get some money, was that the amount the insurer paid out?

Looking at the sums involved in the present case against Ranjit, one can see that this is a very profitable line of business – if one overlooks the shadiness of it.

But what is truly outrageous is that it's been very hard to get the authorities to take an interest in this shady activity. The present case against Ranjit is the exception, not the rule.

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