

Ex-BSI banker downplays role in 1MDB-related transactions

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Singapore prosecutors have attempted to establish in court that ex-BSI banker Yeo Jiawei was in control of and was key to some of the transactions involving Penang-born billionaire Jho Low, who is implicated in the 1MDB fiasco, reported *The Edge* yesterday.

Yeo, who took the witness stand for the second day, continued to downplay his role in these transactions and insisted he was merely a junior banker who took instructions from his former boss Kevin Swampillai.

Yeo is fending off accusations he had a close relationship with Low, who is implicated in the US Department of Justice's forfeiture suits related to 1MDB.

Deputy public prosecutor Tan Kiat Pheng showed the court an email, which originated with an instruction from Nik Faisal Ariff Kamil, a managing director of SRC International, the former subsidiary of 1MDB and BSI's client .

The email showed Swampillai had written to Yeo asking to be briefed on Nik Faisal's instructions in April 2012.

Yeo, who is charged with four counts of tampering with witnesses, however argued that Swampillai might have been away from office that day.

Yeo left BSI bank in June 2014 and worked as an independent consultant, which allowed him to earn between US\$12 million and US\$15 million in his role of "business introducer".

He told the court he merely took instructions from and shuffled documents on behalf of his clients, including Low and his family, as well as Low's close associate Eric Tan.

Yeo claimed he had tried to introduce Aabar Investments PJS CEO Mohamed Badawy Al-Husseiny to buy over Amicorp Bank.

The court was showed a photograph of Low, Eric, Badawy and Amicorp Group CEO Toine Knipping meeting at the luxurious Sandy Lane Hotel in Barbados, where Knipping is based.

"I'm the introducer, I hoped to get a fee out of it," Yeo explained, disagreeing with the prosecutor that he played an important role in the deal, which ultimately did not materialise.

Tan also put to Yeo WhatsApp conversation excerpts between him and Amicorp relationship manager Jose Renato Carvalho Pinto, who was serving clients that included Low, Eric and Aabar.

Yeo is charged for witness tampering, among others, for requesting Pinto to leave Singapore and to destroy his laptop.

The prosecutor established from the messages that Yeo was annoyed that Knipping did not know who he was.

"Tell them I am an ex-banker, who now brokers deals, that has connections to Middle East royal families and prominent businesses in Malaysia and Indonesia," Yeo was reported saying in the text message.

The prosecutor concluded that Yeo had tried to portray himself as a key person as he ordered Pinto to "fix" dates and meetings, and take care of other miscellaneous arrangements.

The court also heard that Yeo, flew from Shanghai to Hong Kong on June 4, 2015 with Low and four others on that flight.

The passengers were Low's girlfriend from Penang, Jesselyn Chuan Teik Ying, Eric, Low's private banker at BSI, Yak Yew Chee and former 1MDB staff Jasmine Loo Ai Swan, who is **wanted** by Malaysian authorities for 1MDB-related investigations.

Others on board the flight were Kee Kok Thiam, and Thai national Laogumnerd Phengphian.

Yeo's hearing continues next Tuesday.