

NEWS

'Modern day monk comparison unrealistic'

SINGAPORE — The previous trial judge appeared "swayed by the prosecution's evidence of the appellant Ming Yi's lavish lifestyle", said the defence yesterday at the appeal case of the ex-head of Ren Ci Hospital and his former aide Raymond Yeung.

Both men — who stood side by side in court — are appealing against their jail sentences and convictions.

Senior Counsel Andre Yeap said the earlier district court judge "appeared to have accepted" that Ming Yi enjoyed "an upper class lifestyle" and "therefore was more likely to be guilty" of the charges against him.

As his appeal was read out, Ming Yi, whose birth name is Goh Kah Heng, bowed his head and closed his eyes. He had bought assets in Australia in 1998 that in-

cluded a plot of land, a BMW car and a country club membership. He was referred to as a "modern day monk" but Mr Yeap countered that "it would be unrealistic to compare the lifestyle of a traditional monk with a current day" one.

Ming Yi, convicted on charges over an unauthorised \$50,000 loan made in 2004, is also guilty of giving false information to the Commissioner of Charities. Yeung, who managed Mandala, a religious artefact shop, was convicted of similar charges. The monk was sentenced to 10 months' jail while Yeung was given nine months.

During the earlier trial, Yeung said the \$50,000 from Ren Ci was a personal loan. This, even though it was accounted as one to Mandala.

Yesterday, Yeung's lawyer Ng

Lip Chih told Justice Tay Yong Kwang his client had forgotten to record the amount in the store's book.

But Justice Tay said if it had been a genuine loan, when queried, Yeung should have just said that he had forgotten to record it. The judge added that the efforts to "plaster over the event raises a lot of questions" and it was like "digging a 20-foot tunnel to bury a small ant."

He also questioned whether it was possible for Ming Yi to "forget" about the loan made to Yeung.

Similarly, Deputy Public Prosecutor David Chew said that the men shouldn't have tried to hide the loan if it had been legitimate.

After an eight-hour hearing, Justice Tay said he would give his judgment at a later date. SHAFFIQ ALKHATIB AND NG JINGYNG

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Good news for the sandwiched class

More than 1,200 EC units expected to come on the market

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SINGAPORE — Prices of executive condominiums (ECs), which have been closing the gap to private condominiums, can be expected to stabilise, say analysts, as the Government releases more sites for such developments.

In all, 1,215 EC units could come on stream from three of the four residential sites being launched by the Housing and Development Board (HDB) from now to next month.

Of the two sites launched today, the parcel at Sengkang East Avenue/Buangkok Drive — which was triggered under the Government's Reserve List on April 1, with a \$103.8-million minimum bid — is specifically for EC housing. Some

465 units could be available in four years.

The other site, under the Confirmed List, is at Sembawang Road/Canberra Drive and can be developed for strata landed housing, condominium housing or flats. The project completion period is six years.

Also being put up for tender next month are two sites which were on the Reserve List in 2008.

The plot at Punggol Field/Punggol Road is earmarked for EC housing — an estimated 615 units — and it will be the first EC site in the Punggol Waterfront Town. It was triggered by a developer's minimum offer of \$147.7 million, and could be completed in four years.

The last land parcel meant for condominium housing is at Yishun Avenue 2/Yishun Avenue 7/Canberra Drive, and some 600 units could be ready in about six years. A developer has committed to offering at least \$137.9 million.

In all, the four sites could yield 1,970 homes, HDB said. "It is good that the government is responding to the strong demand for sites from developers and at shorter intervals," said Mr Colin Tan, head of research and consultancy at Chesterton Suntec International.

Last month, two EC site tenders at Sengkang and Yishun closed at higher-than-expected bids.

This led analysts to predict that new EC prices would narrow the historical 25-to-35 per cent gap with new private condo prices.

Until recently, no new ECs had been launched since 2005, causing pent-up demand.

And the run-up in private home prices lately has made ECs more appealing to the "sandwiched class", said Mr Donald Han, managing director (Singapore) of Cushman and Wakefield.

The gap between EC and condo resale prices has narrowed to 11 per cent from 14 per cent last year.

Thrower 'not happy with replacement coach'

SINGAPORE — He refused to train with replacement coach Ma Yongfeng, who was employed by the then Singapore Amateur Athletic Association (SAAA), because he could not accept Mr Ma's training methods.

So said China-born thrower Luan Wei in a Subordinate court yesterday. He was replying to defence counsel Giam Chin Toon's question if he had boycotted the training sessions because he was unhappy with the departure of his coach Guo Huaiyun.

Mr Luan said he could not accept Mr Ma's attitude. He said he had suggested a different activity to the coach during one session as he had a backache. But Mr Ma told him his back was not injured yet, and he had to wait until he was injured.

The thrower also expressed disappointment with the SAAA's alleged sacking of Mr Guo. "I was at the point where I could progress further but my coach was changed ... I was helpless, and didn't know what to do," he said.

Sub-standard equipment, long

travelling hours and poor training conditions were also complaints listed by the thrower, but these were disputed by the defence counsel, who said the athlete was using them as excuses for his behaviour.

The 27-year-old and his mother, Madam Zhang Ping, are claiming damages from the Singapore Athletic Association for the thrower's loss of opportunities in education and athletics career as a result of his sacking in 2004.

The hearing continues today.
LOW LUN FHOONG