

Company fined \$80k for giving bribes to an MP from Nauru, a country north-east of Australia



🕒 PUBLISHED JUN 28, 2018, 7:20 PM SGT



Shaffiq Idris Alkhatib (mailto:ashaffiq@sph.com.sg)

SINGAPORE - A Singapore-incorporated shipping company was fined \$80,000 in court on Thursday (June 28) for giving US\$19,918.11 (about S\$27,000) in bribes to a member of parliament from the Republic of Nauru.

Getax Ocean Trades, which is the logistics arm of Getax Australia, transferred the money to Mr Ryke Solomon on Feb 18, 2010 in exchange for advancing the business interests of Getax Australia with Nauru.

The tiny island nation - 21 sq km in size - is located north-east of Australia. Its main source of economic revenue is phosphate mining.

Deputy Public Prosecutor Ang Siok Chen said that in 1970, the Nauru Phosphate Corporation, a company owned by the Nauruan government was incorporated to control phosphate mining, and sales and exports of the mineral out of the country.

Its activities were later taken over by the Republic of Nauru Phosphate Corporation in 2006.

Getax Australia was incorporated in Queensland in 1997 and its core business at that time was the exports of phosphates from Nauru and its import to India, said DPP Ang.

Indian national Ashok Gupta and his brother Amit were both directors of Getax Australia until Mr Ashok's resignation in 2001.

Mr Ashok moved to Singapore and incorporated Getax Ocean here in 2004. He also became a Singapore permanent resident, the court heard.

In January 2010, Mr Amit emailed Mr Solomon, now 52, expressing his interest in advancing his family's business interests with the Republic of Nauru Phosphate Corporation. Mr Solomon responded on Feb 4, 2010, asking for at least \$30,000 to fund his re-election campaign in Nauru.

Two weeks later, Mr Amit asked Getax Ocean manager Chidambaram Rajagopal Senthilkumar to transfer the money to Mr Solomon's bank account in Australia.

Mr Senthilkumar, who is no longer with the firm but represented it in court on Thursday, filled up an "Application for Funds Transfer" form and forwarded it by email to Mr Ashok, for his signature.

The transfer was effected for the amount of US\$20,000 of which the sum of US\$81.89 was deducted as bank charges, said the DPP. On Thursday, she urged the court to fine Getax Ocean the maximum \$100,000, stressing that the bribe was made to a public servant.

Defence counsel, Ms A. Sangeetha pleaded for a fine of \$60,000.

She added: "Solomon was not actually in a position to advance Getax Australia's business interests with Nauru as he was only a member of parliament and did not have any control over the Republic of Nauru Phosphate Corporation."

The court heard that Mr Ashok is currently not in Singapore.