

IN THE COURT OF 3 SUPREME COURT JUDGES OF
THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE

[2025] SGHC 205

Originating Application No 4 of 2025

Between

The Law Society of Singapore

...Applicant

And

Li Zhongsheng

... Respondent

EX TEMPORE JUDGMENT

[Legal Profession — Disciplinary proceedings]

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Law Society of Singapore

v

Li Zhongsheng

[2025] SGHC 205

Court of 3 Supreme Court Judges — Originating Application No 4 of 2025
Steven Chong JCA, Belinda Ang Saw Ean JCA and Hri Kumar Nair JCA
14 October 2025

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Hri Kumar Nair JCA (delivering the judgment of the court *ex tempore*):

1 This is an application by the Law Society of Singapore (the “Law Society”) under ss 94A(1) and 98(1) of the Legal Profession Act 1966 (2020 Rev Ed) (“LPA”) for the respondent, Li Zhongsheng, an advocate and solicitor, to suffer one or more of the punishments provided for in s 83(1) of the LPA. The Law Society submits, and the respondent accepts, that due cause has been shown and that he should be struck off the roll of advocates and solicitors of the Supreme Court of Singapore (the “Roll”).

2 Having considered the submissions of the parties, we agree with the Law Society that the respondent should be struck off the Roll. We set out the reasons for our decision.

3 The respondent was admitted as an advocate and solicitor of the Supreme Court of Singapore on 23 August 2021. On 4 February 2025, he

pleaded guilty to and was convicted of the offence of cheating under s 417 of the Penal Code 1871 (2020 Rev Ed) (“Penal Code”). The respondent misappropriated a card holder (the “Card Holder”) containing a credit card (the “Credit Card”) which had been left behind in a private hire vehicle by a previous passenger. The respondent used the Credit Card to purchase various items at a store with a total value of \$4,349. In doing so, he deceived the operator of the store into believing that he was authorised to make purchases using the Credit Card, which in turn caused the operator to process the purchase of the items. This amounted to the offence of cheating under s 417 of the Penal Code.

4 The respondent consented to two other charges being taken into consideration for the purposes of his sentencing: (a) one charge under s 403 of the Penal Code for the dishonest misappropriation of the Card Holder; and (b) one charge for cheating under s 417 of the Penal Code for using the Credit Card to purchase a packet of cigarettes at a convenience store. The respondent was sentenced to three weeks’ imprisonment, which he has completed serving.

5 The Attorney-General’s Chambers (“AGC”) notified the Law Society of these facts by way of a letter dated 30 April 2025. The AGC took the view that the requirements under s 94A(1) of the LPA, which requires the Law Society to make an application under s 98 of the LPA when a regulated legal practitioner has been convicted of an offence involving fraud or dishonesty, were satisfied. The AGC requested that the Law Society commence proceedings under s 98 of the LPA.

6 On 10 July 2025, the Law Society filed this application. The Law Society has stated in its submissions that it seeks an order that the respondent be struck off the Roll.

7 Section 83(2)(a) of the LPA provides that due cause may be shown by proof that an advocate and solicitor has been convicted of a criminal offence, implying a defect of character which makes him or her unfit for his or her profession. For the purposes of this application, this court must accept the respondent’s conviction as final and conclusive: see s 83(6) of the LPA.

8 We agree with the Law Society that due cause has been shown for the respondent to be struck off the Roll. First, the respondent has been convicted of the offence of cheating under the Penal Code, which involves dishonesty. Second, the presumptive sanction in such a scenario is striking off the Roll, and there are no exceptional facts which justify a departure from this rule. We elaborate below.

9 First, the respondent was convicted of the offence of cheating under s 417 of the Penal Code. The plain text of s 415 of the Penal Code, which defines the act of cheating, makes it clear that dishonesty is integral to the commission of the offence. One of the elements of cheating, as defined in s 415 of the Penal Code, is that the accused person must have deceived another person. This court has observed that an act will necessarily involve dishonesty if a person asserts a fact or state of affairs that he knows to be untrue: see *Law Society of Singapore v Chia Choon Yang* [2018] 5 SLR 1068 (“*Chia Choon Yang*”) at [15]. This is similar to the definition of deception, which pertains to inducing a person to believe to be true something which the person making the representation knows is in fact false: *Leck Kim Koon v Public Prosecutor* [2022] 3 SLR 1050 at [27]. Accordingly, it follows that the respondent has been convicted of an offence involving dishonesty.

10 Second, this court has emphasised that misconduct involving dishonesty will almost invariably warrant an order for striking off where the dishonesty reveals a character defect rendering the errant solicitor unsuitable for the profession. This will typically be the case where dishonesty is integral to the commission of a criminal offence of which the solicitor has been convicted: *Chia Choon Yang* at [39]. In such cases, striking off will be the presumptive penalty unless there are truly exceptional facts to show that a striking off would be disproportionate, which will be “extremely rare”: *Chia Choon Yang* at [39]. Given that dishonesty is integral to the commission of the respondent’s offence of cheating, the presumptive penalty of striking off should apply.

11 We agree with the Law Society that there are no exceptional facts which warrant a departure from the presumptive sanction. The respondent accepts that there was no causal link between his mental conditions (*ie*, Major Depressive Disorder and Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) and the commission of his offence. In any event, it is well established that mitigating factors do not carry the same weight in disciplinary proceedings. Unlike criminal proceedings which are punitive in nature, disciplinary action under s 83 of the LPA serves a variety of functions. Where an advocate and solicitor has been convicted of a criminal offence involving dishonesty, the paramount considerations must be the protection of the public and the preservation of the good name of the profession: see *Law Society of Singapore v Caines Colin* [2004] SGHC 250 at [15]. Indeed, the respondent does not contend that exceptional facts exist to warrant a different penalty. He accepts that a striking off order should be made. As such, there can be no doubt that the respondent should be struck off the Roll and we so order.

12 We conclude with an observation on the respondent's conduct after his offending and in these proceedings. He has apologised for his conduct, made full restitution of the amounts cheated, pleaded guilty to the charge against him and readily accepted that he should be struck off the Roll. This suggests that he acknowledges and appreciates the gravity of his offending conduct. Further, he has sought and is receiving regular psychiatric treatment and attending monthly therapy sessions to address his mental conditions. While this does not minimise or excuse his offence, especially since there was no causal link between his conditions and his offending, it demonstrates that the respondent is taking tangible steps to address any underlying difficulties he may have. In this connection, we also note that the respondent has completed a course which equips him with the skills needed to support himself and others in addressing workplace stressors. We commend and urge the respondent to continue with these rehabilitative steps.

13 We fix the costs of the application in favour of the Law Society in the sum of \$5,000, inclusive of disbursements.

Steven Chong
Justice of the Court of Appeal

Belinda Ang Saw Ean
Justice of the Court of Appeal

Hri Kumar Nair
Justice of the Court of Appeal

Kong Man Er (Drew & Napier LLC) for the applicant;
Sunil Sudheesan and Khoo Hui-Hui Joyce (Quahe Woo & Palmer
LLC) for the respondent.
