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DEPUTY REGISTRAR

EVANS NG

7 AUGUST 2026

IN THE STATE COURTS OF THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE

[2026] SGDC 257

District Court Originating Claim No 1255 of 2025
Assessment of Damages No 100 of 2026

Between

Haweina Trading Co Ltd

... Claimant

And

- (1) Bling Blink SG Pte Ltd
- (2) Ng Hui Fen

... Defendants

GROUND OF DECISION

[Civil Procedure] — [Costs]

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Haweina Trading Co Ltd
v
Bling Blink SG Pte Ltd and another

[2026] SGDC 257

District Court Originating Claim No 1255 of 2025
Assessment of Damages No 100 of 2026
Deputy Registrar Evans Ng
4 August 2026

7 August 2026

Deputy Registrar Evans Ng:

1 This is a defamation action in which the Claimant obtained an interlocutory judgment against the Defendants but was not awarded damages. The case citation for the decision on the merits is [2026] SGDC 230. This is the costs decision.

2 The Claimant's counsel, Mr Leng, urged the Court to make no order as to costs. First, he argued that the Claimant made genuine and repeated efforts to resolve the matter amicably, but they did not bear fruit. He took me through the correspondence exchanged between his firm and the Defendants, including the letters of demand. As far as the correspondence was concerned, neither party had behaved unreasonably.

3 The sums sought by the Claimant in that correspondence caught my attention, though. A claim, if made seriously, should not have a half-life. Here, the amount of damages that was “recoverable by due process of law” (r 8(4) of the Legal Profession (Professional Conduct) Rules 2015), as calculated by the Claimant, decayed from \$70,000 in a solicitor’s letter dated 26 May 2025 to \$50,000 in a solicitor’s letter dated 21 July 2025 and then to \$35,000 in the Opening Statement filed on 10 June 2026. None of the three documents explained how the figures therein were derived. This may give a reader the impression that the demands were inflated.

4 Next, Mr Leng submitted that the 2nd Defendant’s conduct was relevant, in that she only took part in the proceedings at a late stage, right before the assessment of damages hearing. Her late participation was not relevant because it was the natural consequence of the interlocutory judgment entered against the Defendants. The Defendants did not cause any delay to the proceedings.

5 Having drawn my attention to the conduct of the parties, I was reminded of the Claimant’s treatment of the 2nd Defendant. At the assessment of damages hearing, Mr Leng relied on a copy of the Claimant’s filed Bundle of Documents. It turned out that the Claimant had sent a different, outdated version of that bundle to the 2nd Defendant and did not inform her of the filed version. I had to stand down the matter for the correct bundle to be provided to the 2nd Defendant. When it came to the costs hearing, the Claimant filed costs submissions for the Court’s advance reading. This time, those submissions were not sent to the 2nd Defendant at all. Mr Leng also did not prepare a copy for the 2nd Defendant’s use at the hearing. That was not even-handed conduct.

6 Lawyers should bear in mind that a self-represented person (“SRP”) would not have the same clerical resources as lawyers do. An SRP lacks access

to the electronic filing system from which cause papers may be retrieved. He or she tends not to constantly check the post, email inboxes or social media inboxes for newly served court papers. Lawyers must therefore take particular care to give sufficient notice of all relevant matters to their SRP adversary.

7 There is no excuse when it comes to documents filed in Court. Rule 30(1) of the Legal Profession (Professional Conduct) Rules 2015 provides:

Where a legal practitioner (A) acts for a party to any proceedings that the legal practitioner knows are pending [...] before the court, the legal practitioner must not initiate any communication with the court about the facts, issues or any other matter in those proceedings, unless —

(a) [...]; and

(b) if A's communication with the court was in writing, every other party to those proceedings is given a copy of the written communication.

Likewise, para 21(1) of the State Courts Practice Directions 2021 provides:

All correspondence to the State Courts relating to or in connection with any pending cause or matter must be copied to all other parties to the cause or matter or to their solicitors unless there are good reasons for not so doing, which should be explained in the correspondence to the Court.

8 Finally, Mr Leng submitted that the matter was not complex. I cannot agree with him. His client has retained three lawyers on record to conduct its case. In any event, the complexity of a matter may affect the quantum of costs, but not the allocation of costs.

9 Turning to the quantum of costs, I also considered the extent to which the Claimant's submissions assisted me in reaching my decision, as that may have a bearing on the quantum. The threshold issue that I had to decide when assessing damages was whether the Claimant possessed a trading reputation in Singapore at the material time. On this issue, the Claimant's written submissions

consisted of six paragraphs of argument, namely paragraphs 24 to 29. I need not reproduce them here. I briefly explain why those arguments did not shape my decision in any way:

- (a) Paragraphs 24, 26 and 27 were based on specific documents that were filed in the Claimant's Bundle of Documents. I could not consider any of the said documents because they were not in the English language as required under O 3, r 7(1) of the Rules of Court 2021 ("ROC"). To the extent that the Claimant's solicitors proffered any translations, they were not certified by a court interpreter or verified by an affidavit of a person qualified to translate the documents as required under O 3, r 7(2) of the ROC. I could not rely on them.
- (b) In paragraph 25, the Claimant speculated about the motivations behind the Defendants' conduct. Although the 2nd Defendant was present at the hearing, the Claimant did not seek to examine her before ruling out other plausible explanations of the Defendants' conduct. I could not rely on speculation.
- (c) Paragraph 28 was an embellishment of an answer given by Ms Yeh in re-examination, which was a bare assertion because it was not supported by any evidence in her affidavit of evidence-in-chief and was inconsistent with her previous answers given in cross-examination. It carried no weight.
- (d) Paragraph 29 referred to some screenshots, annexed to the written submissions, of alleged conversations with the Claimant's Singapore customers. As far as I could tell, none of those screenshots had been adduced in evidence. If I am right, attempting to shore up one's case in this way would be a risky

and questionable manoeuvre. If I am wrong, the screenshots depicted undated text-message conversations conducted in Chinese between unidentified parties, and no translations were provided. Either way, I could not rely on them.

10 I therefore determined costs in accordance with the usual rule and O 21, r 7 of the ROC, which provides that an SRP may be awarded costs that “would compensate him or her reasonably for the time and work required for the proceedings and for all expenses incurred reasonably”. In doing so, the Court estimates the amount of time required on an objective basis: *Mah Kiat Seng v Attorney-General* [2024] 5 SLR 1206 at [13].

11 I estimated that the 2nd Defendant would have spent at least 25 hours reviewing the cause papers, performing research, preparing her cross-examination questions and drafting her Opening Statement. This matter consumed at least three hours of hearing time. The 2nd Defendant did not file any closing submissions. I therefore assessed the compensable time at 28 hours.

12 I applied an hourly rate of \$50 to the 2nd Defendant’s work, having regard to the principle that a litigant is not to profit from costs of legal proceedings and the competent cross-examination conducted by the 2nd Defendant. Had the 2nd Defendant not informed me that her hourly rate at work as an eye-lash artist was \$40 to \$50, I would have fixed her hourly rate at \$80.

13 Based on that multiplier and multiplicand, the 2nd Defendant was entitled to \$1,400 for work done. The 2nd Defendant stated that she had incurred disbursements for transport, which I fixed at \$90. Therefore, I ordered the Claimant to pay the 2nd Defendant costs fixed at \$1,490 (all-in). I made no order

as to costs in respect of the 1st Defendant, which was absent and unrepresented throughout the proceedings.

14 As Mr Leng informed me that they intended to file an appeal against my decisions, I remind the Claimant's solicitors to send the 2nd Defendant all relevant papers well in advance of the appellate hearing.

Evans Ng
Deputy Registrar

Fong Wei Li, Tiffanie Lim Jing Wen and
Leng Ji En Paul (Forward Legal LLC) for the claimant;
The first defendant absent and unrepresented;
The second defendant in person.
