

Amnesia catching in tycoon's trial

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Memory loss struck two more witnesses in the trial of the prominent businessman, Albert Yeung, yesterday.

The prosecuting counsel, Alan Lucas, branded the hearing "a sham" and "a pretence" after the witnesses, both former employees of Yeung, repeatedly claimed they could not remember events in question. The magistrate, Paul Kelly, accepted Lucas's application to have the former colleagues, Paul Ching and Ben Wong, declared hostile witnesses, enabling Lucas to cross-examine them more aggressively.

Yeung, 50, the head of the Emperor Group of companies, has denied two counts of false imprisonment and criminal intimidation towards another former employee, Michael Lam, 31, who gave evidence at the start of the trial at Western Magistracy on Monday.

Ching's claimed loss of memory in the face of persistent questioning about threats Yeung allegedly made towards Lam was described by Lucas as "an affront to this court".

Ching, now unemployed but

formerly a foreign exchange dealer, said his memory had suffered as a result of two operations on his leg, during which he was placed under general anaesthetic for up to four hours.

"It is difficult for me to recollect [the events of last November]," Ching said, offering to show Kelly his injured leg.

"That won't be necessary," Kelly replied.

Lucas accused Ching of feigning amnesia and called for a doctor's report to substantiate his claims.

Ching was in the ground-floor coffee shop of the Mandarin Oriental on the night of December 9 last year, and later in the Central offices of Emperor International Exchange, when Yeung allegedly threatened to break Lam's left leg over a business dispute.

Lam, Ching and Wong are among a group of former Emperor employees who claim Yeung owes them salaries and bonuses.

When Lucas asked Ching if he went to the Mandarin on December 9, Ching, a former vice-president of Emperor International Exchange, said: "It's difficult for me to be cer-

tain about dates. The doctor said so."

Ching's plea for leniency echoed an appeal made by Lam, who claimed on Monday he is suffering from a serious heart problem and should not be aggressively questioned.

Like Lam, Ching and Wong answered dozens of questions yesterday with the reply: "I cannot recall."

Wong, 40, who worked under Lam as an investment consultant with Emperor International Exchange, said that Yeung subjected Lam to a humiliating ordeal on the night of December 9-10.

Lam was allegedly made to go down on his knees and serve tea to one of Yeung's employees, Eddie Shum, whom Lam had quarrelled with.

Wong said Lam seemed frightened because Yeung had threatened to break his leg.

Yeung allegedly told Lam: "I have to ask the most junior employee in the company to come here to slap you and make you become smart," the court was told.

Wong said he averted his gaze as Lam was forced to serve the tea, "to show respect" for Lam, his former boss.

"I think it was a humiliation for [Lam]. It was not good."

Lam was then "scolded" by Yeung for about 15 minutes, the court was told.

Earlier Wong claimed he had "completely forgotten the matter", despite signing a detailed police statement two days after the alleged intimidation.

The defence counsel, Charles Ching QC, said: "He [Wong] has said all he can say. Witnesses do forget what they said. He has said he read the statement and still can't remember."

But Lucas warned Wong that he had made the statement under oath and could face a criminal prosecution if it was found to be false.

At one point in the questioning Wong excused his inability to remember the altercation between Yeung and Lam.

"I didn't sleep well," he said. Lucas told Kelly: "I don't know if Mr Lam suffers from some sort of mental or physical incapacity which affects his memory but he made a statement on December 11 which included detailed conversations between Yeung and Lam."

Yeung, who faces another trial over allegations that he tried to persuade Lam not to give evidence, was released on court bail.