

Malaysian Indian sentenced to life for drug smuggling in Singapore

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Singapore: A 26-year-old Malaysian of Indian-origin has been sentenced to life for trying to smuggle drugs into Singapore, a crime that carries death penalty in the country.

Yogaras Poongavanam was also sentenced to 15 strokes of the canes for trying to smuggle diamorphine into Singapore three years ago.

He was found carrying over 36 grammes of the drugs on April 17, 2012, more than twice the 15 grammes threshold for the death penalty.

He was, however, spared the gallows as he was just a courier carrying the drugs.

Poongavanam had told the court that he had worked for a Malaysian syndicate with 600 runners operating in Singapore and cooperated with the authorities, according to a The Straits Times report.

In judgement ground released yesterday, Justice Tay Yong Kwang said the accused's involvement was "restricted to transporting and delivering the drugs".

Poongavanam had attempted to smuggle the drug through the Woodlands Checkpoint at a causeway link between Malaysia and Singapore by hiding the two packages in the fender of his motorcycle.

But Singapore's Central Narcotics Bureau officers noticed the screws in the fenders were not identical, and when they opened it, they found the two bundles of drugs.

Poongavanam described a syndicate of runners who hailed from remote Malaysian villages and were rostered to deliver drugs on a daily basis.

Poongavanam, who lived in the southern Malaysian state capital of Johor Baru across the causeway and worked in Singapore's theater complex Espalanade as a cleaner, joined the group in March 2012.

Poongavanam said he thought being a drug runner would allow him to lead a comfortable life and be able to support his mother and pay for her medical expenses.

Poongavanam said he was told that he had to perform three deliveries before he could become a permanent daily runner.

But he was arrested on his third delivery to Singapore on April 17, 2012.

The judge added that Poongavanam had been "relatively young", just 22, when he committed the offence, and had later cooperated fully with the authorities, even appearing as a prosecution witness at other trials.

At the start of the trial, Poongavanam had said he wanted to plead guilty, but was disallowed as the court does not allow defendants to admit to a charge carrying the death penalty.

- PTI