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Malaysian on Singapore death row escapes hanging

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SINGAPORE — A Malaysian on death row was acquitted yesterday by the Singapore Court of Appeal in a 2-1 split decision.

Gopu Jaya Raman, now 31, had proved, on a balance of probabilities, he did not know drugs had been placed in the motorcycle he rode into Singapore through Woodlands Checkpoint on March 24, 2014, ruled Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon and Judge of Appeal Judith Prakash, the majority judges.

Gopu was caught by Immigration and Checkpoints Authority officers with three black bundles, containing not less than 46g of diamorphine, that were concealed in the space enclosed by the fenders of the motorcycle. He appeared confused and lost when confronted.

The unemployed man had done drug deliveries previously but maintained the drugs had been planted there that day without his knowledge, when he had entered Singapore to visit his girlfriend and another friend to celebrate his birthday.

On previous occasions, drugs had been packed in green bundles and covered with a scarf, then placed over the seat compartment lid which was covered by the seat.

Gopu had met with a traffic accident the day before and sustained injuries to his chest and leg. He asked his boss, who was only identified as Ganesh, for a RM150 loan to see a doctor but Ganesh refused and asked him to see his friend, who was only identified as "Ah Boy".

Gopu refused Ah Boy's request to deliver drugs and Ah Boy had a discussion with Ganesh before passing the money to Gopu to see a doctor. Ah Boy told him Ganesh would call him later.

After he was caught, Gopu claimed he drafted a text message to Ganesh under the direction of a Central Narcotics Bureau officer, complaining Ganesh had not previously told him about the drugs.

According to Gopu, this showed the officer had believed he did not know about the drugs.

"There was no doubt in this case that Ganesh and Ah Boy wanted to transport the drugs into Singapore. The only question was whether (Gopu) was part of this plan," said the chief justices Menon and Prakash, who found no objective evidence linking Gopu to the drugs.

Tay Yong Kwang was the dissenting judge. He found Gopu's explanation for wanting to enter Singapore on March 24, 2014, not to be credible.

There was "absolutely no reason" for Ganesh and Ah Boy to resort to trickery to get Gopu to bring the drugs into Singapore, especially when Gopu still owed Ganesh half of an RM4,000 loan and needed a further loan for medical attention, Tay said. — Today