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3 in cellphone heist, brutal assault get death sentence

By Selina Lum

THREE men recruited to carry out a million-dollar cellphone heist and fatally assaulted a lorry driver were convicted of murder and sentenced to hang.

Daniel Vijay Katherasan, 25, Christopher Samson Anpalagan, 25, and Nakamuthu Balakrishnan, 49, had brutally bashed up Mr Wan Cheon Kem while robbing his \$1.3-million cargo of 2,700 Sony Ericsson cellphones.

An autopsy found that Mr Wan suffered at least 15 blows.

The trio had been roped in to execute the robbery, but the brains behind the plot were Arsan Krishnasamy Govindarajoo, 40, and Ragu Ramajayam, 37.

Ragu, Mr Wan's colleague who provided inside information about the cellphone delivery, is serving a 4 1/2 year jail term.

Arsan, who hatched the plan but was not at the scene of the assault, was jailed 16 1/2 years for abetting others to commit armed robbery as well as dealing in stolen goods.

Nakamuthu, Daniel Vijay and Christopher Samson went on trial in October last year on a joint charge of murder with common intention. Justice Tay Yong Kwang on Wednesday found that the prosecution had proved its case beyond a reasonable doubt.

The three men seemed calm on hearing the verdict, even as more than 20 friends and family members sobbed quietly in the public gallery.

The prosecution called a total of 98 witnesses to testify. Police statements given by the trio were also produced as evidence against them.

The court heard that in May 2006, Ragu and Arsan plotted to rob expensive cargo transported by the former's employer, a freight-forwarding company.

Arsan then recruited Nakamuthu, an odd-job labourer to carry out the robbery. Nakamuthu, in turn, roped in Daniel Vijay and Christopher Samson, both AWOL national servicemen.

On May 25, the trio stole a baseball bat from a car workshop. Four days later, they discussed the robbery with Arsan.

On May 30, with information provided by Ragu, the trio lay in wait along Changi Coast Road and staged an accident with Mr Wan's 24-foot truck.

After Mr Wan alighted, he was repeatedly assaulted with the bat by Nakamuthu on his head and body. His limp body was dumped on the floorboard of his lorry.

At a carpark in Pasir Ris, they transferred the cargo from Mr Wan's lorry to their own truck.

A passer-by found Mr Wan and called the police. He was taken to Changi General Hospital, but never regained consciousness and died six days later, on June 5.