

Indian man jailed for 25 years for retracting statement

An Indian national who tried to retract his admission to having consensual sex with his stepdaughter since she was 11 was sentenced to 25 years in prison and ordered to be caned the maximum 24 strokes, news reports said Friday.

The 37-year-old information technology specialist gave police five statements over a three-week period, after his arrest in May 2007, when he confessed in detail.

In court Thursday, he insisted that there had been no sexual relationship between them at all.

'Where's the proof?' The Straits Times quoted him as asking during final arguments in which he defended himself.

The Singapore resident cannot be identified to protect the girl's identity.

The step-father said he gave police 'false statements' out of fear and to get the investigations over with so that he could tell the truth when he got to court.

'In my fear and using my imagination, I gave such a story as I was told to do so,' he said, noting he had been handled roughly by police officers.

He stuck with the same version in talks with a psychiatrist, claiming he was still frightened.

The stepfather complained that the police had not stopped his wife and stepdaughter, both key witnesses, from leaving in August for India.

He claimed that he had been set up by the two of them after they learned of his affair with a colleague.

The Interpol bureau in India has been asked to help find the mother and daughter, now 14.

Deputy Public Prosecutor Gordon Oh said the victim's absence is not a reason for acquittal. The law states that a person can be convicted on his statements to the police as long as the court is satisfied they were made voluntarily.

The law states that anyone who has sex with a child below the age of 14, with or without consent, is guilty of statutory rape.

The man indicated through a Tamil interpreter that he may appeal the conviction.

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