

JOHOR BARU: Three men were sentenced to death while two others were jailed for kidnapping a schoolgirl in 2008.

Steven Pangiraja, 27, Vicknes Ponniah, 29, and Ravikumar Ramar, 22, were sentenced to be hanged by the High Court yesterday, while two 19-year-olds were sentenced to be held at the discretion of the Sultan of Johor as they were minors at the time of the offence.

All were charged under Section 3 of the Kidnapping Act 1961, which provides for life imprisonment or death. An accused is liable to whipping should there be no death conviction.

The five were accused of kidnapping then 13-year-old Shalini Paramasivam about 11.20am on April 28, 2008, in Jalan Dato Abdul Hamid, Tampoi in Johor Baru, with the intent to collect a ransom of RM500,000.

According to the facts of the case, the victim was walking to school with a friend when a car stopped in front of them.

Two men grabbed the victim and dragged her into the car.

The victim tried to put up a fight but it was in vain as there were two other men in the car.

Shalini was then brought to a flat and was held there. Calls were made to her father Paramasivam Munusamy for the ransom money.

Threats to "cut her up and send her to Thailand" were also made by the kidnappers during a call at night.

After negotiations, the kidnappers agreed to reduce the ransom to RM100,000.

However, Paramasivam only managed to raise RM80,000 and a meeting was scheduled the next day at a petrol station near the Sungai Besi toll plaza in Kuala Lumpur in the afternoon.

After getting the money, which was placed in a black bag, the kidnappers told Paramasivam that his daughter was back in Johor Baru.

The victim was then released after midnight. She was left at the Larkin bus station and walked home.

In mitigation, lawyers S. Vijayaratnam and Mohd Haijan Omar pleaded for life imprisonment instead of the death penalty, since all the accused had returned 80 per cent of the ransom money to the family after their arrest.

Vijayaratnam also said the victim was not physically or sexually abused during her detention.

"Moreover, the two minors were 16 at that time," said Haijan.

However, deputy public prosecutor Muhamad Iskandar Ahmad urged for a heavy sentence to reflect the severity of the case.

"A serious offence was committed. The victim was only 13 years old at that time. A just decision, as an example to others, should be carried out."

Earlier, a relative of one of the accused lashed out at news photographers for taking pictures of all the accused being escorted into the court.

Meanwhile, Paramasivam said he was glad that his daughter was safe and that justice was meted out.

"But my daughter is still traumatised by the incident. It will take time for her to heal from the ordeal," he said outside the court.