

Accused mass killer denounces confession

OSAKA — A man accused of killing five people by drugging them with muscle relaxants categorically denied in court Wednesday that he committed the crimes and claimed prosecutors forced him to confess.

"I have not killed anybody," defendant Yoshinori Ueda, 40, of Yao, Osaka Prefecture, said as his trial opened before the Osaka District Court. Ueda, who claims to be a dog trainer, allegedly received the relaxants from a veterinarian friend.

His lawyers said they will contest all the charges he faces.

The five victims, with whom Ueda had allegedly been acquainted through his dog-training business, were killed between June 1992 and October 1993, according to the indictment.

The defendant claimed the depositions he made in which he owned up to the charges were in fact false and made under duress during arraign-

ment proceedings before the court.

Ueda was arrested Jan. 26 for allegedly discarding the body of a woman discovered on farmland he was renting in Shioziri, Nagano Prefecture.

Ueda was indicted in the killing of Hiroshi Seto, 23, of Sakai, Osaka Prefecture, a part-time worker, in June 1992. The victim was believed to have been given a sleeping drug and a shot of a muscle relaxant. His body was also found buried in Shioziri.

The indictment further states that Ueda killed Sampei Fujiwara, 33, and construction worker Ko Kashiwai, 20, both of Osaka, in July 1992, and housewives Sachiko Takahashi, 47, and Nobuko Shiji, 47, in October 1993. Their bodies were found buried on the same farm.

Ueda has admitted knowing the victims through his dog-training work.

Police suspect he also murdered Toyohito Kitahara, 18, a pachinko parlor clerk from

Kannami, Shizuoka Prefecture, who has been missing for more than four years.

The prosecution's opening statement said Ueda had proposed to jointly operate either a pet shop or dog training center with each of the victims and received investments from them, and then killed them when he was pressed by the investors to either return the money or carry out the proposed business projects.

The prosecution said Ueda witnessed Osaka veterinarian Hiroshi Isobe, kill puppies by injecting muscle relaxant and became inspired to try the poison on his victims. Ueda gave a Doberman a shot of the relaxant he had obtained from the veterinarian to test the effects of the drug.

Ueda used the poison on his first victim in June 1992, the prosecution said, noting he had obtained enough of the relaxant from the veterinarian to kill about 70 people.

Isobe, 47, was indicted on charges of violating the Veterinarian Law.