



Singapore

## Death penalty for drug trafficking is in Singaporeans' interest: Shanmugam

Home Affairs and Law Minister K Shanmugam stressed that the country's stance on drugs has "saved lives in Singapore".



Law and Home Affairs Minister K Shanmugam speaks to the media on May 23, 2022. (Photo: Kenneth Lee)

Tang See Kit  
@SeeKitCNA

03 Sep 2022 08:01AM  
(Updated: 03 Sep 2022 11:47AM)



SINGAPORE: Home Affairs and Law Minister K Shanmugam said on Friday (Sep 2) that Singapore's policy of having the death penalty for drug trafficking is one that is in the interest of Singaporeans.

Mr Shanmugam was responding to a question about how Singapore balances conflicting viewpoints, domestically and internationally, on the issue at a dialogue session with students from the Nanyang Technological University.

"My starting point (is) what is my task as a minister? Do we say we have tough punishment because we want to be tough? Is it because there's some glory in being tough? None of that," the minister said.

"From something as mundane as building a road to naming a building to having policies – whether it's on aviation, healthcare, Budget, to what kind of penalties we have for littering, molesting, rape, murder, drugs. Everything has got to be based on a certain view on what is in the interest of Singaporeans."

Mr Shanmugam cited a survey done by his ministry among non-Singaporeans from parts of the region, where 83 per cent of the respondents said the death penalty made people not want to traffic substantial amounts of drugs into Singapore.

"If I removed the death penalty, the flow of drugs into Singapore will be much higher. Your lives, your siblings' lives, many other lives would be at risk. More people will die in Singapore if we removed the death penalty," he added.

He also mentioned a separate survey by the ministry, which showed nearly 87 per cent of Singaporeans supporting the death penalty.

### Related Topics

[K Shanmugam](#) [death penalty](#)

[drugs](#)



"So there isn't a great deal of argument within Singapore. It's some people who keep repeating the points," the minister said, before adding that Singapore is not

alone in capital punishment laws. The death penalty is also in place in the world's three largest countries – China, India and the United States.

"All three (countries) have the death penalty so what international practice are you talking to me about?"

Continuing, the minister cited the high-profile case involving [convicted Malaysian drug trafficker Nagaenthran Dharmalingam](#), who was executed in April after 12 years on death row. The case in Singapore had gained international prominence, with headlines focusing on Nagaenthran's alleged intellectual disability.

Mr Shanmugam noted how the United States had executed two men with IQ ranges similar to Nagaenthran around the same time that the Malaysian's final appeal was dismissed.

"Nobody is writing to them. Nobody is complaining," he said.

In his response, the minister also talked about the impact of drugs, citing several examples and statistics such as a World Health Organization report that about 500,000 deaths a year were linked to drug abuse.

"Why are there no questions about that? ... Those lives don't matter?" Mr Shanmugam asked the audience.

If the death penalty is removed, it is "likely that there will be more drugs" and in turn, more drug-related offences leading to a decline in people's sense of safety and security. Singapore's position as an investment centre may also be affected, he added.

But Mr Shanmugam stressed that in Singapore, help is offered to drug abusers "who haven't committed any other offence".

The approach is to treat drug abusers as "people who need help", and they will not be imprisoned or have a criminal record. Instead, depending on the state of drug taking and frequency, they could be sent to a drug rehabilitation centre or be subject to supervisory orders.

"But when we arrest a drug trafficker, we deal with them very harshly. I am prepared to defend this anywhere, minus all these untruths, statements which are intended to put you in a certain frame of mind, and inaccuracies," he added.

"Let's deal with facts – have we saved lives in Singapore? ... The answer is yes."

The minister also talked about external threats, where he largely emphasised on economic competition.

Mr Shanmugam raised examples to depict competition faced by Singapore's two key sectors – maritime and aviation. For instance, the former, which supports about 170,000 jobs and accounts for 7 per cent of the country's gross domestic product, faces challenges such as shifting trade routes and the emergence of newer ports in the region.

He went on to cite a survey by PricewaterhouseCoopers, which estimated regional economies such as Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, Malaysia and Vietnam, to be among the world's trillion-dollar economies by 2030.

"If all our neighbors are doing extremely well and if they have a full suite of services, then the question is what's your relevance?"

"We want them to do well but we want to be relevant so the key task is to find a way in which we can continue to be relevant," he said.

Mr Shanmugam also pointed to new trends brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, such as the trend of remote working.

"The more workers say I want to work from home, the more employers are going to say home doesn't have to be Bishan or Ang Mo Kio. Home can be Bangalore or Shanghai or Manila, where people are prepared to work for one third (or) one quarter (of your salary).

"So what's your value proposition? Why should people invest in Singapore and employ you?" he asked students gathered at Lee Kong Chian Lecture Theatre.

So far, Singapore has "done well" but the minister cautioned that this "is because of the past" and "doesn't predict the future". Adding that Singapore has succeeded in building an economy that is "so substantial and so out of proportion to (its) land size and population", the risk now is "complacency".

Singapore's current advantages such as rule of law and zero corruption may be replicated by others, he cautioned, while adding that other countries also have their own edge like the availability of land and cheaper cost of doing business.

"So there are these issues to think about and whether you think in 10 years, 20 years, 30 years, we will be able to keep up our relative effectiveness, or whether others will overtake us."

*Source: CNA/sk(ta)*