

Singapore: Rejection of Yong's clemency not flawed
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Singapore's Law Minister K Shanmugam has taken umbrage at the remarks of the lawyer representing Malaysian Yong Vui Kong on the republic's death row for a drug-related offence.

In a press statement today sent via the Singapore High Commission in Malaysia, he said that M Ravi, representing the 22-year-old Yong (left in photo), was inaccurate in attributing to him statements which he did not make.

He said he did not comment on any case in the Court of Appeal or on Yong's matter as he had only mentioned the government's legislative policies, and whether that will change.

He added that he had also mentioned the extent to which youthfulness, as in Yong's case and other personal factors, were relevant in the formulation of government policy in tackling the drug menace.

Ravi has been quoted in media reports as saying that comments on Yong's case made by the minister may affect any decision pending.

Standing firm on drugs

He had said in reference to Yong's case, Shanmugam had justified Singapore's mandatory death penalty for drug traffickers by saying that it would send a wrong signal if the Malaysian was spared the sentence because of his youth.

"We (would be) sending a signal to all drug barons out there: Just make sure to choose a victim who is young or a mother of a young child and use them as the people to carry the drugs into Singapore," was the comment Ravi was referring to, and which he said had been carried by the local media.

But, Shanmugam maintained that he did not say this but instead answered a resident's specific question on May 9, whether the government's policy on the death penalty will be changed in the future as a result of Yong's case.

To which he had replied that it was hard to speculate on future policy changes but as of now, the death penalty policy to punish certain drug offences remained.

He had also explained why the fight against drugs cannot be successful if the government made exceptions for persons who were young, like Yong, or based on any other personal circumstance, for example, if the person were a mother of a young child.

"If the government changed its policy and let them go, without facing prosecution, or had different penalties for them, then that would encourage more such persons to engage in the drug trade," said the minister.

"Such an approach would seriously undermine the government's anti-drug policies," he added.

Yong was convicted of smuggling about 47 grams of heroin in 2007 and was handed down

the death sentence, mandatory in Singapore for such crimes involving more than 15 grams of drugs.

Ravi (right) had challenged the constitutionality of the ruling, saying it was 'cruel and inhuman' and not in line with customary international law, but the Court of Appeal had dismissed his arguments.

Recently, Foreign Minister Anifah Ahmad said he will be writing to the Singapore government to plead for Yong's clemency but the republic has yet to receive a letter from Malaysia.

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