

Nazri's stand on death penalty praised all round
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De facto law minister Nazri Aziz's recent statement calling for the abolition of the death penalty has garnered support from civil societies in Singapore who feel their government should adopt the same stand.

Singapore-based human rights NGO Think Centre said it sincerely urges the government to similarly reconsider the death penalty and institute a moratorium on executions.

Think Centre's president Kong Soon Tan said the death penalty does not eradicate drug addiction as the detention and punishment of small-time runners let the main traffickers off the hook.

"Unfortunately, often the drug consumers and 'small fry' runners are executed, while those who mastermind the crime of drug trafficking evade arrest and punishment," said Kong in a media statement.

"Instead, the police force should target the detention and persecution of the big traffickers," he said.

Nazri's call came amidst a recent debate over the issue, after Malaysia last month sought clemency from Singapore for Malaysian death row prisoner Yong Vui Kong, who was convicted of drug trafficking when he was only 18.

He had said, "If it is wrong to take someone's life, then the government should not do it either."

Both countries have tough anti-drug laws and have rarely sought clemency for nationals facing drug charges in the other.

'Judiciary imperfect'

Nazri found an unlikely ally in DAP international bureau secretary and Bukit Bendera MP Liew Chin Tong, who said that he shared the minister's view that the government should not play God.

Liew may seem to be contradicting some of his party members, for example national chairperson and Bukit Gelugor MP Karpal Singh, who recently said that although he opposed the death penalty, he advocated the punishment for perpetrators of baby dumping.

parliament gobind singh ban over nazri mistake 251108 04" He (Nazri) should be praised for speaking out. He was right that the justice system is imperfect, thus it is impossible to prevent error. The death penalty is irreversible and cruel yet (does not contribute to) reducing crime," said Liew, who is also a central committee member of the party.

"I hope Nazri (left) can use his influence as law minister to persuade the government to set up a parliamentary select committee to look into the death penalty and the justice system as a whole," he added.

Liew said it was more important to ensure that criminals are brought to justice through strong police investigative work, with integrity and a judicial system that is just and seen to

be just.

NONEHe also pointed to a police college study in 2005 that said 95 percent of convicted prisoners in Malaysia came from an income group earning under RM1,500 per month.

"It is something that we should all ponder," said Liew (right), who was so struck by Nazri's comment that he emailed Malaysiakini from Seoul, where he is currently attending an official meeting.

"The message to the wider public is not so much the severity of punishment but a public belief that no one will escape the long arm of the law. Such is not the case in Malaysia now," he said.

China mulls abolition

The Council of Churches Malaysia (CCM) also expressed its gratitude to Nazri for his "frank and open" call.

NONEIt also thanked Foreign Minister Anifah Aman (left, in picture) for appealing to the Singapore government for Yong's clemency.

"We brought to the public's attention a similar case of Umi Azlim Mohamad Lazim in 2009, who was also sentenced to the death penalty in China for a similar offence," said CCM exco member Chrisanne Chin.

"In this case, the Chinese government subsequently reconvened on the death penalty after having taken into consideration the full background of the case, the circumstances and clemency appeals by Malaysia," she said.

Chin, who is Malaysian Presbyterian Church deputy general-secretary, said the Chinese government eventually commuted Umi Azlim's death sentence to life imprisonment in March this year.

"We also noted that the Chinese government is the latest country looking into reforming their criminal laws with the view to abolishing the death penalty for non-violent related crimes, following a worldwide trend to abolish the death penalty," she added.

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