



■ @heatherchen_ Sat Oct 22 02:49:15 +0000 2022

Capital punishment in Singapore, the practice of pre-execution 'portrait photos' taken in prison and a question I raised to our government which resulted in a 5-page response. Unpacking all this in my latest @CNN feature:

A lot has been written about the death penalty debate in Singapore and the system has inflicted a lot of pain on inmates and their families. This story opens with a woman sharing her late brother's photos that were taken before his execution.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/10/21/asia/singapore-executions-death-penalty-drug-trafficking-intl-hnk/index.html>

"Doesn't he look so handsome? So happy, and so strong," she told me. Definitely does. (especially when you consider that he already was dealing with the knowledge of his upcoming execution when the photos were taken.)

<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/10/21/asia/singapore-executions-death-penalty-drug-trafficking-intl-hnk/index.html>

I asked prison services about this practice which has existed for years. They were transparent and responded to CNN: "This is done to allow family members to have recent photographs of their loved one." Prisoners can also choose NOT to go through it, they said (1/2)

Not carried in our published piece but Nazira, sister of the late Nazeri said that the family had paid money to SPS to file an application for an extension on his life, ultimately dismissed. "Which do you think we would rather have had?" (2/2)

There has been a lot of international pushback against capital punishment in general and if death sentences really work in deterring people from carrying out crimes. Tons of arguments both for and against

In the case of Singapore, PAP ministers are adamant that the death penalty must remain. This week, for the first time ever, MHA released three full studies showing "strong public support" for the death penalty in "detering drug traffickers"

<https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/mha-studies-support-death-penalty-2023096>

The Singapore government's stance towards the death penalty, in an official statement to CNN: "In [our] experience, the capital sentence has had a clear, deterrent effect on drug traffickers and has helped prevent major drug syndicates from establishing themselves in Singapore."

It gets deeper here.

So: if the death penalty is serving its purpose in deterring drug traffickers, why are we still seeing substantial amounts of reports both on state media as well as CNB, announcing record breaking drug busts?

That was what I asked MHA, and cited reports

First up: cannabis raids, which are reported in the news despite carrying the death penalty. One massive seizure earlier in May this year, which comes after this record breaking one in 2021 -- the biggest in 14 years amounting to more than \$1.7 million

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/singapore-says-makes-biggest-cannabis-seizure-25-years-2021-04-19/>

Heroin seizures have also reached record highs. This one earlier in May, in a car arriving from Malaysia: nearly nearly 18 kg of heroin. The legal threshold is 15g.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/singapore-makes-major-heroin-bust-malaysia-border-2022-05-20/>

On the Straits Times: Close to \$1m of drugs seized from Braddell View, 102 people arrested islandwide (where is the MHA stance re the death penalty and its efficacy)

<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/courts-crime/cnb-drug-bust-over-1-million-of-drugs-seized-from-braddell-hill-1>

CNB report which came out just yesterday: Candy suspected to contain cannabis, cannabis plants, heroin, ice seized during a two-week islandwide operation. 117 arrested
<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/drug-offenders-arrested-cannabis-candy-plants-seized-cnb-3019141>

I asked MHA re the record-breaking drug busts. They said: "These are testament to the capabilities of and efforts by the CNB and other Home Team agencies to keep Singapore drug-free. These enforcement efforts have reduced the flow of drugs into and within Singapore..."

"It is puzzling and erroneous to draw the conclusion that drug busts indicate trafficking rates are continuing to rise despite the death penalty being in place. Without the capital sentence, drug traffickers would be bolder, and traffic larger quantities of drugs into Singapore."

Amnesty also notes "relatively small amounts of drugs" reported in Sg's sentencing cases, indicating that convicted traffickers are those holding "low ranking positions in trafficking rings." "This begs the question if their deaths will substantively disrupt the drug trade."

More from the MHA's response to CNN: "Traffickers deliberately restrict the amount of drugs they carry in order not to exceed the capital threshold. Convicted drug traffickers have also provided first-hand accounts that they deliberately trafficked below the threshold amount."

I also took the opportunity to ask MHA re allegations by activists @justanotherock as well as families of prisoners that death row in Changi Prison was "overcrowded" and seeing more traffickers coming in. This is what the ministry said:
<https://t.co/ksSwog2WQZ>

Allegations that cells are being cleared out are false and baseless.

15. The allegations that "cells are being cleared out to 'make room for new traffickers'" are false and baseless. The availability of cells is not a consideration in scheduling executions. Our prison system is not suffering from lack of space.

16. As mentioned above, all persons sentenced to capital punishment are accorded full due process under the law and the capital sentence is passed and carried out only after a rigorous legal process with stringent judicial safeguards. Prisoners sentenced to capital punishment will be scheduled for execution after they have exhausted all legal channels for appeal and clemency. The scheduling of executions is done with reference to the resolution of various supervening factors based on policy considerations, such as the dates on which the sentences of death were pronounced on the prisoners awaiting capital punishment and any court proceedings affecting them. The law has to take its course once all outstanding matters in respect of a prisoner awaiting capital punishment have been resolved.

Reflecting the local collective's stance: "For every life lost, there will be a new drug trafficker. We need to stop and ask if the death penalty is really working in deterring people from trafficking drugs into Singapore as the government says it does." --@tjc_singapore

Ending: <https://t.co/nt5WbDdzNj>

It's been three months since Nazeri's life was ended.

His sister has some of his photos saved on her phone. "I look at the pictures whenever I miss him" she said.

"We didn't ask for them to be taken but it's still a nice gesture," she said, adding that the family had been asked to provide outfits.

"I don't know how this practice came about, why the pictures were taken, but it shows how (disconnected) the prison and justice system is," she said.

"Because at the end of the day, they killed my brother."