

SAFETY, PROTECTION OF THE POPULATION AND THE LEGAL SYSTEM OF THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE

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Abstract

Though, Singapore is a relatively young country of just 50 years. Past events have made Singapore who she is now. In order to protect ourselves and our beliefs, rules and laws are enforced. It is also essential for us to have a strong army and competent law enforcers to ensure the law enforcement of the country.

Key words

Law, protection population, civil defence, controversial punishments.

Singapore, known as a little ‘red dot’ on the world map. Many wonder if Singapore is a part of China, or if Singapore is a part of Malaysia. However, Singapore is a country and a city on its own, with a land area of 716 km² and a population of 5.5million. Though, Singapore is a relatively young country of just 50 years. Past events have made Singapore who she is now. In order to protect ourselves and our beliefs, rules and laws are enforced. It is also essential for us to have a strong army and competent law enforcers to ensure the law enforcement of the country.

Singapore was under the colonial rule in the 1800s. During the World War II, Japan attacked Singapore and this started the Pacific War. Within two months, the Japanese conquered the whole of Malaya, including Singapore, putting an end to more than a century worth of British colonization. Singaporeans were living in fear and terror under the Japanese Imperial Army. After three years and eight months, the Pacific War has ended. However, the post-war had led Singapore into a brief state of anomie;looting and revenge were widespread. The British Military then returned to Singapore after receiving an official surrender from the Japanese Imperial Army.

Many infrastructures were destroyed during the war. These include electricity, water supply system, telecommunication system and the harbour facilities at the Port of Singapore. There was also a shortage of food, which led to malnutrition, disease outbreak, rampant crime and violence. Series of strikes were happening due to the cumulative discontentment of the high food prices, unemployment rates and workers’ unhappiness. This has led to massive halt in transport and other services.

Decades after the war, there was a political awakening amongst the Singaporeans. This gave rise to the anti-colonialism. In 1959, after years of partial internal selfgoverning, Singapore finally gained full internal self-government. Led by Mr Lee Kuan Yew, the People’s Action Party (PAP) won forty-three seats out of fifty-one seats. Mr Lee Kuan Yew became the first Prime Minister of Singapore. The PAP government embarked on a vigorous program to address Singapore economic and social problems. Despite its success in governing Singapore, the Singapore leaders felt that historic and economic ties between Singapore and Malaysia were too strong for them to be a separate nation. They also felt that the lack of natural resources, the declination of entrepot trade and the rising population in Singapore would be difficult for Singapore’s survival. Hence, they campaigned for a merger with Malaysia.

However, the merger has caused racial tensions. This was constituted by the special privileges that the Malays were entitled to. These include the financial and economic benefits

granted to the Malays. To cease further bloodshed, the Malaysian Prime Minister decided to expel Singapore from the federation.

On the morning of 9th August 1965, the Parliament of Malaysia voted 126-0 in favor of a constitutional amendment about expelling Singapore. Hours later, the Parliament of Singapore passed the Republic of Singapore Independence Act, establishing the island as an independence nation. The new state became Republic of Singapore, with Yusof bin Ishak appointed as her first President.

Singapore has thus faced a future filled with uncertainties due to her sudden independence. Having constrained natural resources and talents, it is fundamental for Singapore to have a system in place for future development. As a Commonwealth nation, Singapore's legal system has its roots in English law and practices. After gaining independence in 1965, Singapore has developed her own autochthonous legal system, legislation and case law that are unique to her social and economic development. [1]

Despite forging the law that is suited to Singapore's requirement, there is still one law that is inherited by the British legal foundation: common law. The structure of the laws of Singapore is based on the Legislature, Executive and Judiciary.

The Legislature comprises of the Parliament and an elected President whom are tasked with the laws of land. Singapore has a unique Parliament composition compared to Czech Republic. Besides the elected Members of Parliament (MPs), the non-elected MPs also sit in Parliament but their voting rights are restricted. Executive led by the elected President and the cabinets, which is responsible for the general direction of the country. They are accountable to the Parliament. Singapore has an extensive system of judicial. There are two tiers in the judicial hierarchy. The first tier of hierarchy, State Court, is to carry out justice for the people. The courts conducted civil court sessions while the second tier of hierarchy, Supreme Court, hear criminal cases. While the MPs in Czech Republic are elected using the party-list proportional representation system, the MPs in Singapore are voted into the office following a general election. [4]

Law and Order is perceived to be fair and just in Singapore, regardless of race, language or religion. Singapore strives for equality as Singapore is a multi-racial country, where we treat everyone equally. So in the name of law, whoever has broken the law will have to bear the full consequences.

Singapore has incorporated strict laws in governing the country. This constitute to a clean and safe garden city, Singapore, with good security system. However it has also gotten some controversial views from the West. Some examples include banning of chewing gum, littering and vandalism, prohibition of food and drinks on public transports, having designated places for smoking and even "jay-walking". The punishments of these crimes may vary from fines to jail-terms, or even public canings. [3]

The recent vandalism case in Singapore that involves two Germans being jailed and caned has led to a global controversy. These two Germans have flown in to Singapore from Australia in November 2014 and had vandalized a train during their stay. They were charged with vandalism and trespassing. Despite the appeals from their home country, they were sentenced to three strokes of caning and nine months in jail. Many questioned if this only applies to the foreigners and not the locals. As Singapore law is fair and just, it does not only apply to the foreigners, it applies to everyone. If they are in Singapore ground, they have to abide by the laws set by the Singapore government. The case of "Sticker Lady" in 2013 has clearly illustrated this point. Ho and her accomplice, whom are Singaporeans, were charged with mischief for affixing adhesive stickers on traffic light controller boxes and spraying paint words on public roads. They were both convicted with 240 hours of community service after pleading guilty. So, whether you are a foreigner or a local, if you are within Singapore ground, you have to abide by the law of Singapore. [2]

The severity of punishments is decided by the judge instead of the jury. There is no jury system in Singapore. Once the punishment is decided, the offender has the choice to bring the case to the Court of Appeal.

The offenders are then brought to the Singapore Prison Service, a government agency under the hierarchy of the Ministry of Home Affairs, where 14 prisons and drug rehabilitation centers can be found. The Singapore Prison Service is made up of carefully selected professional team of uniformed officers as well as psychologists and counsellors. The punishments such as caning, is administered by well-trained officers that are specially selected and trained for the job. Punishments as such are in addition to the jail-term and never on its own. These are the punishments that are deterrent to the crimes in Singapore. [7]

One of the controversial punishments, that is still implemented in Singapore, is Capital Punishment, otherwise known as Death Penalty. Many human activists often argued that all human life is sacred, and no human has the right to deprive another's right to live. They therefore, assert the hypocrisy of the court of law to commit the crime that the murderers are guilty for. They often debate that there are other forms of dealing with the offenders, such as incarceration and reformation. Though reformation and rehabilitation might be adequate for criminals who are truly repentant. However, there are a large number who are not penitent. Hence, rehabilitation cannot guarantee the safety of the rest of the society from the obdurate conscience of hardened, habitual criminals, whereas capital punishment can, effectively. This is to ensure the Singapore's safety and security per se.

In Singapore, death penalty has served as an effective deterrence for people who want to commit crime. Singapore has a renowned reputation in the world for having one of the lowest crime rates. It can be said that the strict laws in Singapore and the capital punishment play a big role in having to make people think twice about committing crime because of the heavy penalties. In fact, for certain crimes, execution are given media coverage. So as to educate the public of the types of offences which will consequence in capital punishment.

Some examples of these offences are as follows:

- Waging, or attempting to wage war against the Government
- Offences against the President
- Mutiny
- Piracy that endangers life
- Drug Trafficking
- Kidnapping or abducting in order to murder
- Murder

If found importing, exporting or in possession of a certain quantities of drugs a mandatory death sentence will be given. Likewise, for the people who are caught manufacturing, they will be sentenced to death penalty despite the amount produced. However, in November 2012, legal reformation against death penalty has been passed down. Those who faced death penalty are given the opportunity to ask for resentencing under certain circumstances. [5]

Though in the eyes of the West, it may seem that the Singaporean government has intruded the people's life. However, in the eyes of Singaporeans, we have the luxury of minding our own business because the government has minded everyone's. Singaporeans can roam freely in the street at night without the fear of being mugged or raped, especially for the girls. Hence, it is seemingly evident that the laws that are enforced have alleviated injustice, corruption and crime rates.

Although it is crucial for the government to implement laws to make the nation a safer place, the government cannot ignore the real threats to our security today. They have the responsibility to take precautions against foreign threats as well.

Singapore is geographically situated between the countries, Malaysia and Indonesia. Hence, Singapore's security concerns stem from the potential of ethnic and cultural strife from the neighbouring countries, excessive nationalism and dependence of Malaysia for water. Singapore has strategic constraints as well due to its geographical location, this constitutes to the decrease in warning time. Hence, it is a fundamental for Singapore to have a strong defense line and avoid any invocation of battlefield.

In order to have a strong defense line, Singapore has worked on all three aspects: air, navy and army forces. Due to the small population, it is mandatory for all male Singaporeans and third generation Permanent Residence (PR) to served the nation; National Service. The duration of enlistment is 2 years. Upon finishing rounds of tests, the men will be posted to Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF), Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) or Singapore Police Force (SPF). Also, Singapore relies mostly on conscripts and reservists, this is fundamental in creating a highly trained force with technically advanced weaponry. Having forward defense, preemptive strike and strategic mobility is the fundamental for Singapore's national security. It is also enhanced by Singapore's effort to create a friendly defense relationship in the region. In addition, Singapore takes a collaborative approach to her security problems. Singapore has also developed a good relationship with numerous countries so as to gain access to the training facilities and technologies that will be beneficial to be the country military trainings. [6]

Though Singapore is a rather safe environment, we have to be prepared for possible emergency. Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF) is the main agency in charge of the provision of emergency services in Singapore. The main role of SCDF is to provide fire-fighting, rescue and emergency services; mitigating hazardous material as well as implementing and enforcing the fire safety and civil defence matters. It also plays a major role in Singapore relief operations.

As Singapore defense and emergency force are mainly made up of conscripts of different races and religions, it is crucial for them to be able to work together effectively. As without cooperation, there would not be an effective fighting force. Singapore has adopted a draconian stance on the issue of racial and religious harmony. Singapore has acted quickly to arrest the culprits who endangers the harmony in Singapore. The Religious Harmony Act and Sedition Act are examples of law enacted by the government to protect Singapore's multi-cultural society. Under these laws, those found guilty of trying to undermine racial and religious harmony, by plotting terrorist acts or posting insensitive racial speeches will be severely dealt with by the law. Race and religion are highly sensitive issues in Singapore. Learning from our history, it sharply reminds us how easily a few thoughtless words can cause a grave offence to many. [8]

Other than the implementation of laws, specific groups, such as Mendaki, and organizations, Inter-Racial & Religious Confidence Circles, are set up to ensure that the minority views and needs are met. These measures and efforts taken to regulate behaviours on discrimination have been proven effective. Together with the wide publicity given to them by the state-regulated media and minorities being represented in politics, these measures have indeed succeeded in curbing public speeches and actions that may lead to racial or religion violences. This is seemingly effective as Singapore is one of the few countries where racial harmony is present. There would always be pros and cons with any policy that is undertaken by the government. Hence, it would be prudent for the government to have the foresight when making the policy and to strike a balance between the two spectrums. This is to ensure that history would not repeat itself.

All in all, Singapore government and Singaporeans worked together and learnt from past experiences to prevent the history from repeating itself again. With the lesson learnt from past events and the law enforcements incorporated, we are able to construct and build a safe and harmony nation, we called our own.

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