

55/96

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SINGAPORE : AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CONDEMNS EXECUTION OF FIVE THAI
MIGRANT WORKERS

Amnesty International strongly condemned today's execution of five Thai nationals in Singapore and calls on the Singapore Government to stop any further executions.

"We are dismayed that these executions went ahead despite repeated appeals for the Singapore Government to commute all death sentences to periods of imprisonment," Amnesty International said today.

"The death penalty is a violation of the most fundamental of human rights -- the right to life -- and is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment."

Thai migrant workers Prawit Yaowbutr, Manit Wangjaisuk, Panya Marmontree, Prasong Bunsom and Panya Amphawa were hanged at dawn after having been convicted of the murder of two Indian workers in September 1993 and a Burmese worker in November 1992. Singapore police stated that the men were part of a gang that had staged robberies at a series of work-sites.

Appeals for clemency by Thai non-governmental groups and representations by Thai officials failed to halt the executions. Funds were raised in Thailand to enable the families of the condemned men to visit Singapore but the hangings took place before relatives of three of the men arrived.

The organization remains concerned that the death penalty is often imposed on those with fewer resources for their defence, or whose social or migrant status makes them vulnerable to instances of unfair conviction. The risk of executing the innocent is inescapable, yet the death penalty is irrevocable.

"Executions are inherently unjust and arbitrary however terrible the crime -- moreover there is no reliable evidence that executions have a unique deterrent effect on criminals," Amnesty International said.

The high rate of executions in Singapore is a serious source of concern. At least 121 people, including nine Thais, have been executed since 1994, mostly for drugs-related offences. There are fears that the total figure may be significantly higher as many executions are not publicised. While Singapore's President has discretionary powers to commute death sentences, he rarely exercises clemency.

"The organization will continue to work for clemency for people condemned to death all over the world, including Thai migrant workers in Asia," Amnesty International said.

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