

## **Bilahari Kausikan replies to question on Aloysius Pang's death, says NS policy & realistic training vital**

**The retired diplomat believes that ongoing tensions will exist between Singapore and the rest of Southeast Asia.**

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Retired diplomat Bilahari Kausikan attended the Singapore Perspectives 2019 lecture, organised by the Institute of Policy Studies, to give his views on ASEAN and foreign policy.

However, during the question and answer session of his panel, he fielded a question from a member of the audience about Aloysius Pang.

Pang, an actor, died on Jan. 23 from injuries sustained while performing reservist duties in New Zealand. He was 28 years old.

### **National Service and rising tensions**

Bilahari had earlier discussed rising tensions between Singapore and Malaysia.

Audience member Angie Chew, who said she did not represent any particular organisation, asked:

“Our young men are being put on alert whenever the governments are arguing. And with the recent loss of Aloysius Pang, I would like to share that as a parent, we are all very concerned about the safety of our children, especially our boys.

And leadership comes with accountability. And what is your view in terms of accountability both in terms of words are spoken and the lives of our young men being put at risk. Not for war, but for practice. And this has been ongoing, many lives have been lost.”

She added that “we need transparency.”

### **Singapore still needs a strong deterrent capability**

First, Bilahari replied that tensions between Singapore and the rest of Southeast Asia will always exist because of “inherent contradictions.”

He said that “this is an existential state of affairs, you’re going to need a strong deterrent capability. To have a strong deterrent capability, you will have to have realistic training.”

However, he emphasized that he was not making light of training accidents, but they did occur despite precautions being taken.

Second, Bilahari believes that given the environment that Singapore is in, there is “no substitute” for deterrence.

Remarking specifically on tensions with Malaysia, Bilahari said Singapore had to demonstrate that there is a limit beyond which Malaysia should not go.

He said that without Singapore being able to demonstrate that from time to time, in a broader context of having a strong deterrent force, things are more likely to get out of hand, not less.

### **Wait for Committee of Inquiry results**

Drawing on his past National Service experiences, Bilahari said he was enlisted in 1971, and left the reserves when he was 50 years old.

In that time, he said that training safety standards have been raised, and that it was being taken “very seriously”.

He also mentioned the Committee of Inquiry set up to investigate the circumstances surrounding Pang’s death.

Bilahari said:

“I don’t think Mindef has been untransparent about this last or previous incidents. But this tragedy just happened, quite recently, I believe a Committee of Inquiry will be instituted, and I think the results of that Committee of Inquiry will be made public.”

He concluded by asking her to reserve judgment and not to confuse two things that are “quite separate”:

“National Service policy, realistic training is vital, because without that, there is no deterrence. If there is no deterrence, bilateral tensions will get worse, not better.”

The concluding remark received much applause from the audience.