

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT BY THE
MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS MADE IN PARLIAMENT
ON MONDAY 21 APRIL 2008**

**THE COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY'S FINDINGS ON THE
ESCAPE OF MAS SELAMAT ON
WEDNESDAY 27 FEBRUARY 2008**

Mr Speaker Sir, on Wednesday 27 February 2008, ISA detainee Mas Selamat bin Kastari escaped from the Whitley Road Detention Centre (WRDC). A day after his escape, I apologised in this House for what had happened, and promised that in due course I would give a full account of his escape. At that point, the full facts had yet to be fully established. I repeated this assurance a fortnight later, telling Singaporeans that after the Committee of Inquiry (COI) completed its work, I would give a full account on how Mas Selamat escaped and what would be done to prevent another escape.

The Committee of Inquiry

2. I convened a COI on 1 Mar 2008 under the Prisons Act so as to objectively establish the facts of what happened. I appointed Mr Goh Joon Seng as Chairman of the COI. Mr Goh is a retired High Court Judge and, a member of the Council of Presidential Advisers and the Chairman of the Presidential Council on Religious Harmony. The two other members are Mr Tee Tua Ba and Dr Choong May Ling. Mr Tee is a retired Commissioner of Police and currently non-resident Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates. Dr Choong is a senior Administrative Officer and the Deputy Secretary (Security) at the Ministry of Home Affairs.

3. I tasked the COI to determine the full facts relating to Mas Selamat's escape. It was also to examine if there were lapses in WRDC's custodial system, the physical security and procedures, and recommend improvements to ensure that a similar incident does not recur.

4. The COI conducted its inquiry proceedings at WRDC itself so that the members could re-visit the site whenever they needed to. The COI could also hear testimonies from as many staff of the WRDC as the COI deemed necessary. In all, the COI recorded statements from 41 individuals and heard testimony from 36. The COI also arranged for re-enactments of the possible ways that Mas Selamat could have escaped.

5. I had directed that the COI was to be given full access to all information and to WRDC, including full access to highly classified and sensitive information on operational systems and processes, as well as access to interview the Internal Security Department (ISD) intelligence and field personnel whose identities need to be protected given the nature of their jobs. I had explained that this inquiry could not be held in public. Its very purpose was a thorough examination of a sensitive installation – the WRDC, including its detention, security, investigation and intelligence gathering functions, which are all inter-related. It needed to directly examine officers, including those holding classified appointments. Exposing these details in public would compromise the persons and processes involved in our security and intelligence operations and put these operations at risk. Holding the inquiry out of public view enabled the COI to have the full and unfettered access needed to fulfil their mission and establish the full facts.

6. The COI has completed its inquiry and submitted its findings and recommendations to me on 10 April 2008. I met the COI and asked the members if they were satisfied that they had been given full access and cooperation to carry out their inquiry. The Chairman personally assured me that this had been the case. The COI has been candid in its report, and has held nothing back in its conclusions and recommendations.

7. I have read the COI's report closely. I agree with the COI's findings and accept all its recommendations which I will cover later. Given its details and observations on the various operational processes in the WRDC, I am satisfied that indeed the members of the COI have done a thorough job.

8. I have briefed the Prime Minister and Cabinet on the findings of the COI. Because many sensitive details cannot be disclosed for obvious reasons including the identity of ISD and other security personnel as well as the precise work they do, the Cabinet agreed that it is not possible to release the entire report without harming national interest and endangering the men and women who serve the nation. We had also considered releasing the COI's report with the sensitive parts blacked out, but that was not feasible as the details are extensive. It would not only make understanding the report difficult, but also fuel the distraction of baseless speculation. However, we are very conscious that Members of this House and the public have a keen and valid interest in the findings of the COI. Hence, the Government has decided to release the Executive Summary of the COI report to show that the COI had carefully considered all the issues.

9. I will begin with a detailed account, based on the COI report of how Mas Selamat escaped, followed by the COI's findings on the factors that led to his escape, and its recommendations. I will also inform Members about what actions I will take. In the process, I will answer the questions raised by Dr Teo Ho Pin, Mdm Ho Geok Choo, Mr Chiam See Tong and Mr Low Thia Kiang.

Mas Selamat Kastari's Escape from WRDC

10. On 27 February 2008, Mas Selamat was scheduled to meet his wife and children during his weekly family visit scheduled between 4.00pm and 4.30pm that day. Family visits to sustain the detainee's bonds with his wife, children and other family members are an important part of the rehabilitation programme for detainees. The family visit was to be held in the Family Visitation Block. This is a building which was retrofitted to serve this function and is located in a separate part of WRDC from where the detainees' cells are housed in the Cell Block. The Cell Block, of course, has by design, the tightest level of security.

11. Mas Selamat was escorted by two Gurkha guards and a Special Duty Operative. The Gurkha Contingent (GC) guards the detention centre and ensures the secure custody of the detainees. Special Duty Operatives are ISD junior officers whose duty is to make administrative arrangements for family visits, which include supervising the movement of detainees from the cell to the family visit room. The day to day administration and operations of WRDC come under the charge of the Superintendent of the WRDC who is a senior officer holding the rank equivalent to a Superintendent of Police or Lieutenant Colonel in the SAF.

12. At approximately 3.30pm, the Special Duty Operative requested the Guard Commander to take Mas Selamat out of his individual cell for his family visit. At about 3.35pm, two guards were assigned to escort Mas Selamat.

13. Mas Selamat was first escorted from the Cell Block to a locker room in the Locker Block to change into civilian clothes. At each family visit, the detainee's family can bring civilian clothing for the detainee to wear at the next family visit. Inside this locker room are several columns of lockers. Each locker contains a personal clothing bag that belongs to each detainee. The WRDC Administration has custody of the keys to the lockers.

14. While inside the locker room, Mas Selamat asked the guard for a curtain so that he could change behind it. There was no curtain. Mas Selamat then stood behind a column of lockers to change and was out of the line of sight of the guard.

15. After changing, Mas Selamat emerged wearing a light yellow baju kurong and greenish-grey pants, and was escorted by the two guards and the Special Duty Operative to the Family Visitation Block. At about 3.54pm, the four, i.e. the two guards, Special Duty Operative and Mas Selamat, arrived at the Family Visitation Block. Mas Selamat used the toilet located next to the family visit room to shave and comb his hair before meeting his family members. This toilet he used is intended for use by WRDC staff and detainees' family visitors. However, for practical

convenience, detainees also use this toilet when proceeding for family visits.

16. One guard stood outside the toilet, while the other followed Mas Selamat into the toilet. After Mas Selamat had finished shaving, he entered a urinal cubicle and closed the cubicle door. The guard who followed Mas Selamat into the toilet stood outside the closed door of the urinal cubicle. Mas Selamat then flipped his pants over the ledge above the urinal cubicle door. The guard heard the sound of water from a running tap inside the urinal cubicle. After a few minutes, the guard felt that Mas Selamat was taking too long. He alerted the other guard standing outside the toilet, who then turned to the Special Duty Operative who was outside the toilet.

17. The Special Duty Operative, who is female, subsequently asked Mas Selamat's male Assistant Case Officer to check on Mas Selamat as he was in a male toilet. When the Assistant Case Officer kicked open the door of the urinal cubicle, Mas Selamat was not inside. The ventilation window pane located above this urinal cubicle had been swung open. An immediate alert was raised to the GC Guard Room in the WRDC that Mas Selamat had escaped. In all, the COI found that Mas Selamat had about 11 minutes between the time he was brought to the toilet at 3.54pm and 4.05pm when the alert was raised. Within that time-frame, he took time to shave, then entered the urinal cubicle, turned on the tap and flipped his pants over the concrete ledge above the urinal cubicle door and made his escape.

18. Mas Selamat climbed through the toilet ventilation window and out of the Family Visitation Block. The ventilation window turned out to be not properly secured. I will give more details about this later on.

19. The COI finds no conclusive evidence of the exact escape route he took after this point. The COI surmises that Mas Selamat could have climbed onto the roof of an enclosed staircase and walkway at the section where the perimeter fencing converges with this enclosed staircase and walkway.

This point is adjacent to the Family Visitation Block, and about 20 metres from the toilet window. Mas Selamat could then have jumped over the perimeter fence and out of WRDC. The COI observed that the light yellow baju kurong which Mas Selamat was wearing was found in the forested area outside the perimeter fence near this spot. However, the COI notes that pinpointing a specific escape route would be speculative, given the many possibilities and the lack of conclusive evidence on this issue.

20. The COI believes that Mas Selamat had planned his escape over time and he had seized the opportunity presented by the confluence of various factors to escape on 27 Feb 2008. The COI believes that the routine use of the toilet in the Family Visitation Block would have provided Mas Selamat with the opportunity to plan his escape. Prior to his escape, during previous family visits, Mas Selamat had partially closed the urinal cubicle door on some occasions, and then completely closed the urinal cubicle door on subsequent occasions. On 5 Feb 2008, he had closed the urinal cubicle door completely and turned on the water tap.

21. The COI believes that these actions by Mas Selamat could have been done to test how the guards would react. This could have also helped him to prepare for his actual escape attempt. This planning had not been noted by the guards, possibly because the guards are frequently rotated to avoid over familiarisation or fraternisation with detainees.

Factors Leading to Mas Selamat's Escape

22. Let me now deal with the factors that enabled Mas Selamat to escape. Having heard and considered the evidence from witnesses and re-enactments, the COI believes that Mas Selamat was able to escape because of a confluence of three factors. One, the ventilation window through which Mas Selamat had escaped, was not properly secured. It was not grilled. Two, the guards had not stopped Mas Selamat from closing the urinal cubicle door and as a result lost line of sight of the detainee. And

when Mas Selamat took too long in the urinal cubicle, the guards had not acted quickly enough. Three, the convergence in the perimeter fencing with the enclosed staircase and walkway at the back of the Family Visitation Block was a physical weakness that Mas Selamat probably exploited to get out of WRDC. Let me say more about each of these three factors.

The Ventilation Window Was Not Grilled

23. Mas Selamat was able to climb through the ventilation window because there were no grilles over the ventilation window. The COI learnt that the WRDC Administration had in fact intended to grille all windows in the Family Visitation Block when it began planning for the renovations of WRDC in 2004. These renovations were to upgrade the facilities to address the growing requirements of WRDC and its detainees. ISD had instructed the vendor to install grilles for all windows. But when the renovation works were carried out in 2007, this toilet ventilation window was not grilled up. This arose due to a difference in understanding between ISD and the vendor over exactly which windows were to be secured with grilles.

24. Nevertheless, a WRDC staff did a walkabout to review the status of renovations some time between April and May 2007 and detected the ventilation window without grilles. He alerted the Superintendent of WRDC to this weakness. Instead of having it grilled, the Superintendent instructed that the handle of the ventilation window be sawn off as a security measure to make the window secure. He thought this would be adequate as he assumed that the guards would always have sight of detainees. This was bad judgment on the Superintendent's part.

25. In my view, the security weakness of this window is the single most crucial factor which enabled Mas Selamat to escape. This is because the movement of the detainee from his cell to the Family Visitor's Block is always under tight escort and entry into the Block is through a sealed passage-way. The omission to fully secure this ventilation window in the Family Visitation Block toilet routinely used by detainees was a glaring weakness which

should have been rectified properly by grilling it up, and not dealt with in an ad hoc manner by sawing off the window handle.

The Guards Failed in their Duties

26. The guard who escorted Mas Selamat while he was using the toilet, did not stop Mas Selamat from closing the urinal cubicle door. This allowed Mas Selamat to get out of his line of sight. The guard had assumed that the urinal cubicle was a secure facility and that Mas Selamat could not escape from it. This assumption was wrong.

27. When this guard felt that Mas Selamat had taken too long in the toilet, he referred the matter to his fellow guard instead of taking immediate action to check on Mas Selamat. This officer in turn asked the Special Duty Operative. Finally, it was the Assistant Case Officer who kicked open the urinal cubicle door. If the guard had immediately checked on Mas Selamat in the urinal cubicle, Mas Selamat might have been stopped or at least, his escape would have been discovered earlier.

28. In my view, these factors taken together form the second most critical security failure which enabled Mas Selamat to escape.

Weaknesses in Physical Security

29. Once Mas Selamat got out of the ventilation window, he was able to get over the double perimeter fencing of the WRDC. The COI could not determine exactly how he did this. Of the different possible scenarios, the COI surmises that Mas Selamat could have exploited a weakness in a section of the perimeter fencing at the back of the Family Visitation Block. This was a section where the roof of an enclosed staircase and walkway converges with the perimeter fencing. The COI surmises that Mas Selamat could have climbed onto this roof, and from there, jumped over the perimeter fencing and out of WRDC.

30. We do not know if indeed this scenario is correct. But regardless whether it was exploited by Mas Selamat to make his escape, the failure of the WRDC staff to detect this particular weakness in the fence-line in past security reviews is a failing.

31. The COI also notes that the CCTV coverage of the area was in the midst of being upgraded to add motion-detectors. This was part of a major CCTV security surveillance system upgrade for the whole complex. At the time of the escape, there were two CCTV cameras mounted at the location where Mas Selamat climbed out of the Family Visitation Block. However, these cameras were not commissioned yet as they were part of the CCTV system upgrading and the system was still in its testing and validation stage. As such, at the time of the incident, there was no recording or active monitoring of these cameras. This is very unfortunate because if there had been operational cameras in the right places to record the escape, then we could have an idea as to how he got out of WRDC.

The Post-Incident Response

32. The COI also examined the immediate post-escape response by ISD, GC guards and the Police and found them to be sufficiently prompt. On discovering Mas Selamat's escape, ISD immediately locked down Whitley Road Complex ("WRC") which WRDC is part of. The inner and outer gates of WRC compound were closed and thorough checks were conducted on all vehicles leaving the compound. The guards on duty in WRC were activated and a cordon along Onraet Road was set up about five minutes after the discovery of Mas Selamat's escape. Road blocks were set up by the ISD officers and GC guards in the immediate vicinity, e.g. Mount Pleasant Road at around 4.20pm. Senior officers from the GC Headquarters, which was alerted of the escape at 4.10pm, arrived at WRC within 20 minutes of being notified, at about 4.30pm. GC Trackers next arrived at about 4.35pm and started an intensive search of the wooded areas in the vicinity of WRC.

33. Police and ISD officers also conducted intensive and systematic searches of WRC and its immediate vicinity. The search area that was cordoned off at about 4.40pm was considerable and is equivalent to the size of almost 44 soccer fields¹. It covered WRC, the former Police Academy and surrounding compounds, and the wooded areas around Onraet Road, Mount Pleasant Road and Thomson Road. It was not a straightforward search. WRC itself is segregated into several clusters of low-rise buildings. The former Police Academy and surrounding compounds comprise a number of vacant buildings.

34. A CID team of investigators were also deployed at the scene at WRDC to interview persons and conduct forensics examination. Their role was to determine if there had been any collusion by any WRDC insider. I will talk more about this later on.

35. Beyond these immediate measures taken at WRC by the GC guards, ISD and Police, MHA also promptly mounted a comprehensive operational response to the escape. In the first few hours, the immediate priority was to mobilise all Home Team resources to capture Mas Selamat. Counter Terrorism Units deployed at the checkpoints were alerted at 4.30pm. This was followed shortly by the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) activating a high level alert among all personnel and stepping up 100 per cent checks to tighten the security at our land, sea and air checkpoints. SAF units were activated to support the extensive search operations by 8.00pm the same evening.

36. Police and ISD officers on the ground were tasked to pick up any leads on Mas Selamat. Ground intelligence units were activated and immediately spread out to collect any pertinent information on Mas Selamat. This was critical as ISD could not

¹ The rough estimate of the area bordering Mount Pleasant Road, Onraet Road and Thomson Road is 36 hectares or 360,000 sqm. This covers the WRDC, former Police Academy, Senior Police Officers' Mess, and the surrounding wooded areas. A soccer field is 8,236 sqm (dimension 116 m x 71 m) in size.

be sure, in the immediate moments after Mas Selamat's escape, whether he had outside help.

37. Since 1 Apr 2008, after conducting a systemic sweep through the forested areas, the security agencies have moved into a more targeted phase of the search. This is guided by what was learnt during the earlier extensive sweeps and also from specific intelligence picked up in the course of these earlier operations. These efforts will continue to be multi-pronged. Apart from such searches, we are maintaining tight border controls and round-the-clock surveillance of coastal and forested areas. In parallel, intelligence-led operations are actively ongoing. Community vigilance efforts will also continue. Since Mas Selamat's escape, about 1,500 calls have been received by 999. The Police followed up on all leads, especially reports of possible sightings of Mas Selamat by the public.

38. Mr Low asked about the estimated cost of the manhunt. To-date, these operations are covered under my Ministry's and the Ministry of Defence's existing operating resources and we have not asked for additional funds. We have worked within the framework of our contingency plans and re-deployed current manpower and resources in a targeted manner. This also ensures that our continuing operations are sustainable over a protracted period without undermining the other functions of the Home Team and the SAF.

The COI's Recommendations

39. The COI's assessment is that the WRDC's custodial protocols and procedures over handling of detainees are generally sound. For instance, detainees are secured in individual cells to prevent them from communicating with one another. Different blocks are linked via enclosed walkways to prevent detainees from familiarising themselves with the layout of WRDC. When a detainee moves within the WRDC compound, he is escorted by at least two guards and his movements are logged. The lapses which occurred were in breach of established protocols and procedures.

40. Nonetheless, the COI observed some weaknesses in operationalising WRDC's systems and processes and has made specific recommendations.

41. Let me now highlight the COI's key recommendations, all of which I have accepted, as I said earlier.

Centralise Command and Control

42. The COI observed that the framework of security at WRDC was based on shared responsibility. ISD was responsible for the physical security infrastructure and the GC guards were responsible for the safe and secure custody of detainees, security of the inner perimeter and Cell Block and deployment of sentries at strategic locations within WRDC. This "dual" or "parallel" security system by ISD's WRDC staff and GC guards runs the risk of each party being blind-sided by each other. For instance, the Superintendent thought that the ventilation window at the toilet was secure enough by sawing off the handle, partly because he had assumed that the guards would have line of sight of the detainee at all times. On the other hand, the guards were confident that they had the detainee under close supervision even without line of sight because they assumed the toilet facilities to be properly secure. To avoid such ambiguity and misunderstanding, the COI recommends that as the WRDC is an ISD facility, ISD should assume overall command and control of all aspects of WRDC operations, including its security.

Enhance Communication and Coordination

43. The COI recommends better coordination and communication among the three functional groups operating within WRDC, namely the WRDC Administration which is responsible for the general management of WRDC and the custody of detainees; the GC guards who are responsible for guarding WRDC and for escorting detainees within and outside WRDC; and the Operations Group which is in charge of investigations. The COI recommends that a formal system of

feedback be established to ensure that all parties have a common understanding of instructions, issues and problems are raised in a timely fashion.

Conduct Regular Ground Exercises and Security Audits

44. The COI also recommends that ISD conducts regular exercises for front-line officers and institutes a system of regular security audits of WRDC. This will enhance coordination at the working level as well as raise preparedness for any contingency. The regular security audits will also ensure compliance with procedures and rules as well as periodically, review the security of WRDC holistically.

Design and Build a new Detention facility in Changi Prison

45. A key recommendation by the COI is that a new Detention Centre be built and located in Changi Prison. I have asked my staff to work out a detailed implementation plan and schedule for this recommendation which requires careful planning and execution. I see much merit in it. Let me explain why.

46. One of the things which struck me in the COI findings was the recognition that WRDC is a complex multi-functional facility. WRDC is not a prison per se, like those under the Prisons Department. It is a holding centre which supports the investigation and intelligence collection and analysis related to an on-going security operation. Rehabilitation, whether religious or secular, is above all to serve a practical national security interest – to neutralise the security threat that the detainee poses to society. WRDC is therefore a purpose-built facility to serve a number of concurrent purposes. It has to balance the need for hardened physical security on the one hand, and flexibility to support operational and intelligence activities on the other.

47. Prior to the JI arrests and detentions in 2001, the number of detainees was small. In the whole decade of 1990s, only six persons were detained in total. Since 2001, the sudden surge in the number of JI arrests and detainees has undoubtedly strained

the human and operating capacity of WRDC. At its peak, WRDC had to hold 41 detainees.

48. In 1995, ISD had considered the idea of shifting the detention centre to Changi Prison as the lease on the WRDC site was running out. Plans were drawn up, pending a decision on whether the lease would be renewed. Eventually in 2003, the lease was extended by 20 years. Because of the increase in JI detainees and overriding need to handle them effectively, ISD decided to keep to the existing WRDC and to embark instead on a renovation and re-development programme for WRDC.

49. In 2002, ISD carried out some minor works as a stop-gap measure to accommodate the expanding requirements. These minor works included converting officers' quarters into offices and subsequently into a Family Visitation Block. This block was originally outside WRDC itself. The WRDC compound was then enlarged and the enlarged WRDC incorporated the Family Visitation Block. The enlarged WRDC covers an area of 2.2 hectares or the size of 3 football fields. With the extension of the lease and the overriding need to effectively handle the larger number of JI detainees, ISD began to develop a major renovation and re-development plan for WRDC in late 2004. Renovation works finally started in early 2007.

50. In my view, such periodic renovation and improvement works over time altered the security eco-system of WRDC. Like all security agencies, ISD operates in a compartmentalised manner. While this is a strength in safeguarding secrets on a "need to know" basis for an intelligence agency, it also makes a shared facility such as WRDC vulnerable to blind spots when issues falling between the different functional groups at the Centre, are missed.

51. The COI's recommendation to shift the detention centre to the Changi Prison Complex will, among other things, ensure that security and prison operating standards of the detention centre are always tied to best practices. At the same time, ISD can tap Prison's medical and food logistics for its detainees. However,

and let me emphasise this - careful thought must be given to how to operationalise this plan to ensure that it meets ISD's needs while, at the same time, not undermine Prison's operating regime. Among other things, we definitely do not want to expose the prison inmate population to "contamination" by extremist detainees. This has been the bad experience in many countries where prisons have been one of the most fertile sources of new terrorist recruits.

52. I have tasked Director ISD and Director Prisons to co-chair a team to study the implementation details for a new purpose-built detention facility within Changi Prison. They should re-visit the current approach and overall tone of the detention centre and affirm or adjust accordingly, to make it a facility relevant to the complex challenges of a new security landscape.

53. Meanwhile, I have asked Director ISD to revise the protocols for the escort and detention of detainees at WRDC in consultation with Director Prisons. Director Prisons will also conduct an independent audit annually to check that these revised protocols are strictly adhered to, and report his findings to me.

Establishing Liability, Accountability and Follow-up Actions

Determining if there was Collusion by Officers in WRDC

54. One question which needed to be answered clearly when the escape occurred is whether this was an inside job. Was Mas Selamat assisted by anyone inside WRDC to escape? Determining this is critical because if there were such collusion, then its continuance undetected would lead to more escapes.

55. In the course of its inquiry, the COI found no evidence of connivance, collusion or assistance given to Mas Selamat, on the part of any individual. The COI observed that no one individual had full control to bring about the confluence of the material factors at the time of Mas Selamat's escape, as I have explained earlier.

56. The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) also launched an independent investigation on the day of the escape to establish whether there was criminal liability on anyone's part. The CID investigation has been completed with extensive interviews and forensic examination of the site. Polygraph tests were also administered to some witnesses to support investigation. The CID has found no evidence to suggest collusion on the part of any of the ISD officers, WRDC staff or guards involved.

57. The CID submitted its investigation papers to the Attorney General's Chambers to determine if any offences have been committed. I am informed that the Attorney-General has considered the investigation papers and concluded that there is no basis to lay criminal charges against any individual. However, this does not mean that no departmental disciplinary action will be taken against the officers accountable for the lapse. I will say more on this later.

58. ISD also immediately launched its own internal investigation to establish if Mas Selamat received any assistance to aid his escape. This included scrutiny and review of all the past family visits of Mas Selamat and his contact with any staff. ISD's investigation has also not found any evidence to suggest collusion on the part of ISD officers or guards at WRDC in assisting Mas Selamat to escape.

59. ISD also examined whether Mas Selamat could have been assisted by anyone outside WRDC. ISD's assessment on the basis of the investigation and available intelligence is "No". Could he have secured help after his escape? While there is no intelligence to confirm this, the possibility cannot be dismissed and is indeed a scenario pursued by ISD even now.

Complacency Creeping in over Time

60. In my view, while the COI and the CID investigations found no malice or criminal liability on the part of any officer implicated

in Mas Selamat's escape, there is no avoiding the fact that the escape would not have happened but for the security and operational lapses identified by the COI. Mas Selamat was able to exploit these weaknesses when the opportunity arose. A window that should have been grilled but was not; guards who should have maintained line of sight of the detainee under their escort, and who should have immediately checked why the detainee took so long in the urinal cubicle, but did not; physical security weaknesses that were not plugged – these all point to a slackening in internal vigilance and supervision. Complacency for whatever reason, be it fatigue given the protracted security operations by ISD since 2001 or routinisation over time, had crept into the operating culture at WRDC.

61. That no detainee had escaped from WRDC before may have been one reason why an escape was unimaginable in the minds of those who run WRDC. Even when the guards and the Special Duty Operative became concerned over the time Mas Selamat was taking in the toilet, they did not think that he might have escaped.

62. One question that some have asked is – why was Mas Selamat not held in Changi Prison instead? On hindsight, Mas Selamat could have been held in Changi Prison as it would have been neater and certainly less problematic. After all, ISD does transfer the more difficult and hostile detainees to Changi Prison. But in Mas Selamat's case, he was not hostile although he was not cooperative. And so long as there was hope to extract useful intelligence from him, ISD preferred to hold him in WRDC. The potential intelligence value from such a detainee to the on-going counter-terrorism investigation is significant.

Taking Corrective Action

63. What has happened is a costly and painful wake-up call. Director ISD met me and told me that he accepted responsibility for what has happened and apologised. Having known him for many years, I told him that I have full confidence in him and he must carry on. His first priority is to find Mas Selamat and take

immediate action to prevent another escape. I also consulted the Prime Minister who agreed with me.

64. I have instructed Director ISD to follow up immediately on all the recommendations of the COI. I know that following the escape, immediate action was taken to strengthen security at the WRDC. For example, the toilet window has been sealed. Other actions such as raising the height of the perimeter fence are in progress and should be completed by May 2008.

65. In addition, Director ISD will seek Director Prisons' endorsement on the revised protocols for the escort and detention of detainees at WRDC. Director Prisons will also conduct an independent audit annually to check that these revised protocols are strictly adhered to, and report his findings to me.

Enforcing Discipline and Disciplinary Action

66. I have directed Commissioner of Police and Director ISD to investigate the operational lapses related to the escape and to ascertain accountabilities, taking into account the findings of the COI and CID reports. Officers who are responsible for Mas Selamat's escape will be disciplined and penalised. In this connection, I have asked Director ISD to examine the roles not only of the WRDC junior officers but also to go up the chain of command and include the supervisory and management levels of WRDC as well. There is a proper process for disciplinary action under civil service or Police Force rules and this must take its course.

67. I have also instructed Commissioner of Police and Director ISD to replace the officers at WRDC responsible for Mas Selamat's escape as identified in the COI report.

Closing Remarks

68. I have spoken to the ISD and GC officers. I can see that they feel the disappointment most acutely because they have

fallen short of the high standards that Singaporeans have come to expect from them. This security lapse in WRDC came as a rude and painful shock to them; all the more when the mistakes have turned out to be so simple as to appear silly and incredible.

69. I can appreciate this sentiment because this was what I felt on 27 Feb 2008. I was shocked and disappointed when first informed of Mas Selamat's escape on 27 Feb 2008 via a message on my handphone. At that moment, I was in this House in the midst of answering questions on PMO's Committee of Supply.

70. There is no doubt that Mas Selamat's escape is a major setback for ISD and for MHA. It is a dark stain on the record of successes which ISD has achieved in the fight against terrorism. It was ISD which uncovered the clandestine Jemaah Islamiyah terrorist network and its links to the Al Qaeda in 2001. Before that, nobody had heard of the terrorist organisation. Singaporeans were saved from an otherwise catastrophic attack planned for early 2002 when ISD disrupted the JI operational cells collaborating with Al Qaeda operative, Mansour Jabarah and the JI bomb maker, Fathur Rohman Al-Ghozi. These two individuals were later arrested by foreign governments. ISD's intelligence has also significantly supported the investigation into the Al Qaeda and JI networks in the region as well as other parts of the world. Even now, no doubt with morale sorely affected, the ISD and its officers continue to also pursue every lead and intelligence to further their counter-terrorism operations which have kept us all safe.

71. Do not misunderstand me. I mention these facts not to absolve or excuse the ISD from responsibility for its officers' mistakes or lapses. I mention these facts because we need to be fair and balanced in our judgement and not "throw the baby out with the bath water." Yes, this episode of Mas Selamat's escape is a bad mistake and officers who did not carry out their duties as required will be held accountable. But ISD, the organisation and the many dedicated and committed officers who continue to serve in it, are resolved to pick themselves up, recover their

spirits and move forward relentlessly in their national mission. We must support them in this.

72. ISD's contribution in countering terrorism and keeping Singapore safe is crucial. Indeed, all the Home Team agencies have played and will continue to play a vital role in the security of Singapore.

73. Before I end, let me thank the SAF for deploying their resources and men in the hunt for Mas Selamat. Much credit is to be given to both the active and operationally ready NSmen in the SAF and the Home Team for their commitment and efforts over the last 7 weeks in the search for Mas Selamat.

74. I also want to thank the many Singaporeans who have actively put their minds to the problem, to share their ideas and help us. I know that they were equally disappointed over this security lapse but they stepped forward to work with the Government to address the immediate challenge.

75. Of course, there were also Singaporeans who wrote to me or blogged in the internet expressing anger and in some cases, abuse. Others thought the whole episode made good creative material for cynical humour. I understand their frustration. This incident should not have happened. But since it did happen, my first priority had to be to establish the full facts of what and how it happened and at the same time, galvanise and focus the energies of the Home Team and its partners, including the community, to tackle the situation at hand.

76. I am deeply grateful for the way Singaporeans have rallied behind our efforts even as they rightly expect a proper accounting. This is why I have given Members and the public a full account of what happened, what we will do to fix the problem, and how we will ensure that the same problem does not happen again in the future.

77. The fight against terrorism is on-going. Today, for the second time, that fight includes the search for Mas Selamat. And

just as we found him the last time, even when he thought himself safe hiding among JI friends outside Singapore, so we will eventually again track him down, arrest him and detain him.

I will now answer questions from Members.