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MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS PRESS STATEMENT

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The Police have foiled a plot by a group of Singaporeans and foreigners to traffic in Vietnamese refugees. The group was about to finalise arrangements to bring out 3,500 refugees in the vessel, the Tonan Maru, when its members were arrested in May 79. In the course of investigation, it was found that one of them, ALLAN ROSS, was also involved in the actual trafficking of refugees in another vessel, the Southern Cross. In both cases, it was with the complicity of the Vietnamese authorities. ALLAN ROSS, 36, and a businessman, CHONG CHAI KOK, 30, who was involved in the Southern Cross affair, have been detained under the Criminal Law (Temporary Provisions) Act.

Others arrested were three Singaporeans and three foreigners. The Singaporeans involved in the abortive plot were NG LIM CHIEW and ALLAN CHEANG WEI CHEN, both businessmen and PATRICK YOW SAI CHONG, a shipping contractor. They have been released but their passports have been cancelled for three years. Of the foreigners, the Employment Passes of SVEN OLOF AHLQVIST, a Finnish sea captain and LIU TONG JU, a Taiwanese businessman, have been cancelled. The Social Visit Pass of HSU-BI-SHIEN, another Taiwanese businessman, has also been cancelled. OLOF was involved in the Southern Cross Affair while the Taiwanese were involved in the abortive plot.

The Abortive plot

Four Singaporeans and two Taiwanese, in collusion with an Indonesian Chinese contact in Vietnam, conspired to bring out 3,500 Vietnamese refugees on board the Tonan Maru. The refugees, to be charged two taels of gold for each adult, and one tael for each child, were to have been taken to an Indonesian island. But Singapore was not ruled out as an alternative destination.

The Indonesian Chinese in Vietnam is a businessman named ABDULLAH alias TEOH I KING. In February 79, he approached his business associate in Singapore NG LIM CHIEN, 40, to transport refugees out of Vietnam. ABDULLAH was to gather the refugees and NG was to secure a vessel to pick them up.

NG asked another business associate of his, ALLAN CHEANG WEI CHEN, 32, to help find a vessel. CHEANG, in turn, contacted ALLAN ROSS as he knew ROSS had experience in handling refugees in the Southern Cross affair. ROSS brought PATRICK YOW SAI CHONG, 55, a shipping contractor, into the group. Through YOW, ROSS was introduced to two Taiwanese businessmen, LIU TONG JU, 43, and HSU BI-SHIEN, 36. HSU was to have left for Taipei on 9 May to finalise arrangements with the owner's representative for the use of Tonan Maru when the police moved in.

NG's office was used as the communication centre between Vietnam and Singapore. ABDULLAH sent a cable to the group saying that 3,500 refugees were ready to be picked up inside Vietnamese waters before 15 May 79. ABDULLAH had provided the password "9 Minh" to be used in case the vessel was stopped by Vietnamese patrol boats.

The group had expected to transport 15,000 refugees out of Vietnam in three batches. The total takings were to have come to 15 million dollars. The group was to get 40 per cent of it.

The Southern Cross Affair

The mastermind behind the Southern Cross affair was TAY KHENG HONG, 51, a businessman now detained in Malaysia for trafficking in refugees in the vessel, the Hai Hong, in October/November 78. TAY approached CHONG CHAI KOK, Managing Director of Seng Bee Shipping Pte Ltd for the use of the vessel, the Southern Cross. He charged the refugees at the rate of two taels of gold per adult and one tael per child.

CHONG and OLOF allowed TAY to use the Southern Cross. CHONG also provided the crew and arranged the bunkering. To safeguard their interest, they sent ALLAN ROSS to accompany TAY on the vessel to keep an eye on the operation and to look after their share of the

gold /3.

gold payment. When the Southern Cross had picked up its load of refugees and left Vietnam, OLOF went out in another boat and met the Southern Cross at a pre-arranged rendezvous. He brought TAY and the gold back to Singapore. ROSS and OLOF rejoined the Southern Cross after it failed to land the refugees in Mersing. The ship drifted and beached at Pulau Pengibu in Indonesia. For this venture, CHONG and OLOF together received more than \$500,000 in gold and ROSS received about \$18,000.

29 JUNE 1979

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Appendix

SUMMARY OF STATEMENT BY ALLAN ROSS ON THE SOUTHERN CROSS AFFAIR

In his statement ALLAN ROSS spoke of how Vietnamese officials and soldiers were involved in the Southern Cross affair. ROSS together with TAY KHENG HONG was on board the Southern Cross when it sailed to Vietnam to pick up refugees in August 78. He recounted that while the ship was in Vietnamese waters a pilot launch, flying a red flag with a yellow star, came alongside. The pilot boarded the Southern Cross and spoke to TAY in Vietnamese. ROSS said the pilot later used the ship's radio and communicated with someone in Vietnamese before guiding the Southern Cross to a wharf in Ho Chi Minh City.

A Vietnamese in civilian dress then showed up in a jeep driven by a man in green army uniform. He was escorted by a soldier carrying a rifle. He came on board the Southern Cross and spoke to TAY. After he left the ship was provided with fresh water supply and vegetables.

ROSS added:

"SOLDIERS WERE SEEN PATROLLING UP AND DOWN
THE WHARF, BUT THEY DID NOT DISTURB US AT ALL."

The Vietnamese official returned the next day and proposed to load the Southern Cross with 800 refugees. ROSS said he and the chief officer protested that the ship could not carry that many people - but to no avail.

The following day, the Southern Cross, guided by the same pilot moved up Saigon river and dropped anchor at the mouth of the river. The pilot and three armed soldiers spent the night on board the ship.

ROSS said:

"AT ABOUT 0800 HOURS THE FOLLOWING MORNING, WE
SIGHTED THREE WOODEN TRAWLERS, EACH ABOUT 40 FEET
IN LENGTH AND ONE STEEL BARGE ABOUT 100 FEET IN
LENGTH, APPROACHING THE SOUTHERN CROSS FROM UP
RIVER. ALL THE VESSELS WERE JAM PACKED WITH
REFUGEES AND THERE WERE TWO ARMED SOLDIERS ON
EACH ONE OF THEM. ON REACHING THE SOUTHERN

CROSS, THE ...2/-

CROSS, THE REFUGEES STARTED SCRAMBLING MADLY ON BOARD. THE SOLDIERS TRIED THEIR BEST TO GET EVERYBODY ON TO THE SOUTHERN CROSS. THIS TOOK MORE THAN AN HOUR, AFTER WHICH THE TRAWLERS AND THE BARGE LEFT WITH THE SOLDIERS."

During the loading, two Vietnamese came on board and handed to TAY four sacks of gold. This was payment to them for taking out the refugees. In addition, the refugees had also to pay the Vietnamese authorities between six to eight pieces of gold to leave Vietnam.

ROSS said:

"AFTER ALL THE REFUGEES HAD BOARDED THE SOUTHERN CROSS, THE PILOT THEN GUIDED US OUT TO THE OPEN SEA FOLLOWED BY THE PILOT LAUNCH. ON THE WAY OUT, WE WERE FLYING THE VIETNAMESE FLAG. WE JOURNEYED FOR ABOUT TWO HOURS BEFORE THE PILOT LEFT US IN HIS LAUNCH. WE THEN CARRIED OUT ON OUR OWN. WE DID NOT DISPLAY ANY BANNER OR SIGN TO INDICATE THAT OUR VESSEL WAS CARRYING REFUGEES.ON THE WAY OUT OF VIETNAMESE WATERS WE WERE NOT MOLESTED BY ANY VIETNAMESE PATROL BOATS."

Eventually 1,200 refugees were taken on board the Southern Cross. After leaving Vietnam, the Southern Cross sailed to the waters off Mersing, but arrangements to land the refugees there failed. The ship was then taken to the Indonesian waters where it was beached at Pulau Pengibu.