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**SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT**

**(ISSUED BY THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE)**

Mr Devan Nair's open letter to the Prime Minister, published in the Straits Times of 9 Jul 88, takes issue with the Government's disclosure of medical reports on Mr Devan Nair's medical condition.

Mr Devan Nair was the President of Singapore. His behavior, both in Sarawak and in Singapore, had raised serious questions for him, for the people and for the Government of Singapore. The Cabinet therefore arranged for Mr

Devan Nair to be examined by the most competent of doctors, and asked for full medical reports to help the Cabinet decide whether he should remain as

President.

In Mr Devan Nair's case, public interest overrode the customary practice of professional confidentiality between doctor and patient. This is entirely in accordance with government practice, as specified in the IM (Instruction

Manual). When civil servants are sick, “the Parliament Secretary ... may call for a report from the Head of the institution where the officer is under treatment. In this case the rule of professional confidence cannot be used to exempt any Medical Officer from stating the result of a medical examination of an officer, which will be graded Confidential” (IM No 2, J 108). This principle applied with equal force to a President who had a medical condition and whose position was under review.

Seven Singapore doctors diagnosed Me Devan Nair’s condition as alcoholism. This was also the final diagnosis by Dr Stanley E Gitlow, after he had treated Mr Devan Nair for two months at the Caron Foundation in New York. The Government therefore accepted the judgment of these medically qualified men.

Mr Devan Nair now maintains that he was a victim of deception and that he was never an alcoholic. He claims that the Prime Minister “successfully pontificated to a man rendered highly suggestible by a psychotropic (mood-altering and mind-changing) drug”. In other words, after the doctors had heavily sedated him to make him into believing that he was an alcoholic.

There was no reason for the Prime Minister to suggest to Mr Devan Nair that he was an alcoholic. It made no difference to the Prime Minister whether Mr Devan Nair was suffering from an enlarged liver, alcoholism, or any other disease. The Prime Minister and Mr S Rajaratnam met Mr Devan Nair for 25 minutes at the Singapore General Hospital on 27 Mar 85. They had gone there together to settle the question of Mr Devan Nair's resignation, and brought along a typed copy of the letter of resignation that Mr Devan Nair had drafted but not signed.

Mr Devan Nair did not refer to alcoholism in his letter of resignation. He asked whether the Prime Minister would refer to it in the statement to Parliament. The Prime Minister said he would consider not "pontificate" to Mr Devan Nair about alcoholism. After 20 minutes of argument, Mr Devan Nair signed the letter.

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The following day, 28 Mar 85, when the Prime Minister was not present, Mr Devan Nair wrote a letter to the Prime Minister admitting his alcoholism. On 11 Apr 85, Mr Devan Nair again wrote to the Prime Minister, explaining how he realized his condition a year before his visit to Sarawak in March 1985.

The Government did not publish the details of Mr Devan Nair's behavior at the time of his resignation. It hoped that this would spare Mr Devan Nair and his family some of the embarrassment arising from the circumstances of his resignation, and would help him readjust to a normal life. However, Mr Devan Nair's recent actions, and the likelihood that he would continue what he has since called his "one-man campaign" abroad, using the world media against the Singapore Government, made it necessary to declassify these confidential documents and put the facts on record.

With the White Paper, the people of Singapore are now better placed to understand Mr Devan Nair's motives, see through his actions, and discern the gap between his statement and reality. The Government hopes that once this is accomplished, this unhappy episode can be closed.

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