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Singapore Government

# PRESS RELEASE

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## MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS PRESS STATEMENT

The Internal Security Department on 19 Apr re-arrested eight of the 21 Marxist conspirators released between Jun and Dec 87. They are:

William Yap Hon Ngian  
Kenneth Tsang Chi Seng  
Wong Souk Yee  
Kevin De Souza  
Teo Soh Lung  
Chng Suan Tze  
Ng Bee Leng  
Tang Lay Lee

They were first arrested in May/June 87 and detained for up to seven months for their involvement in a Marxist conspiracy. Except for Ng Bee Leng and Tang Lay Lee, who are on Restriction Orders, the others were on Suspension Directions which have been revoked on 19 Apr.

The eight ex-detainees issued a joint statement on 13 Apr 88 denying categorically that they were ever involved in any conspiracy. They claimed that they were detained "for the legitimate exercise of our rights as citizens" and denied that they were "instructed" by Tan Wah Piow, Paul Lim, Vincent Cheng, or any political party to do what they did.

Another signatory to the joint statement, Tang Fong Har, is now in the United Kingdom. She had the permission of Director, ISD to visit Hong Kong and the United Kingdom between 7 Mar 88 and 7 Apr 88. By failing to return to Singapore by 7 Apr 88, she has breached a condition of her Suspension Direction. She is liable for prosecution under the Internal Security Act and a Police gazette for her arrest has been issued.

The arrests of the Marxist conspirators in May 87 followed lengthy and intensive ISD investigations. ISD had monitored the principal persons, Tan Wah Piow and Vincent Cheng, since the early 1970s. In Jun 86, ISD had apprised the Government of the activities of Vincent Cheng and a group of radicals operating under the cover of the Catholic Church. The Government took a serious view of such undesirable activities. On 9 Jul 86, the Minister for Home Affairs warned the Archbishop, Monsignor Gregory Yong, about the problem. Despite this, Vincent Cheng and the others continued with their radical activities. Therefore, when the Pope visited Singapore on 20 Nov 86, the Prime Minister took it upon himself to register his concern with the Pope in the presence of Archbishop Yong.

The Government only decided to launch the May 87 operation after careful deliberation. It could have allowed the Marxist conspiracy to fester and grow, in order to watch where it would lead, but decided it would be safer to nip the conspiracy in the bud. ISD had by then gathered as much information as was possible without interrogating those involved. Vincent Cheng was also planning to leave for the Philippines to pursue further studies. There was a danger that he would be further radicalized and would further widen the Marxist network.

Following the arrests, through seized documents and interrogation of detainees, ISD confirmed the facts of the conspiracy, and discovered further details it was not previously aware of. Arising from the disclosures, ISD made further arrests in Jun 87.

The main facts of the conspiracy were published in a series of government statements and media interviews with the detainees. Those arrested were involved in a Marxist conspiracy to subvert and destabilize the country to establish a Marxist state. The central figures were Tan Wah Piow and Vincent Cheng. Vincent Cheng said on television that he was setting up a Marxist network and systematically infiltrating religious and other bodies and building up pressure groups for confrontation with the government. This would start with peaceful protests, escalating to mass events, "leading to public disorder and maybe even rioting, bloodshed and violence."

The nine ex-detainees who issued the joint press statement had admitted the facts of their involvement in signed statements and in television interviews. Teo Soh Lung and Kenneth Tsang revealed that they went into the Workers' Party in late 1984 after Paul Lim, Tan Wah Piow's emissary, urged them to enter politics. Tang Fong Har recounted how she and Teo Soh Lung had attempted to turn the Law Society into a pressure group after meeting Paul Lim. William Yap, Wong Souk Yee and Chng Suan Tze described their involvement in the drama group Third Stage, which was formed as a vehicle to reach out to and radicalize the public. Ng Bee Leng, an ex-SPSU\* activist, related how they helped the SPSU radicals regain control of the Union. Tang Lay Lee said she encouraged SPSU activists and Catholic student leaders to maintain their links in order to build up their

\*SPSU: Singapore Polytechnic Students' Union.

solidarity and maintain their "social orientation". Kevin De Souza also revealed how Vincent Cheng made use of him to reach out to and cultivate Catholic students.

The Marxist nature of the network was substantiated by 2 subsequent discoveries. Ex-detainee Lim Li Kok, who ran the bookshop "Single Spark", revealed that she had sent books on Singapore and Malaysia to the CPM through Tan Wah Piow. Independently, the Malaysian Special Branch uncovered links between Tan Wah Piow and the CPM. Mohd Yunus Lebai, a radical Malaysian student who was detained in October 1987 by the Malaysian Government, has told the Malaysian Special Branch that he met Chin Peng, the Secretary-General of the CPM, in Beijing. Chin Peng offered to send Mohd Yunus to study in Britain and to finance him. Chin Peng directed Mohd Yunus to Tsui Hon Kwong in Hong Kong. Tsui paid for Mohd Yunus' education after checking with Tan Wah Piow. He also put Mohd Yunus in touch with Tan Wah Piow in London.

Lim Li Kok's statements have hitherto not been disclosed for operational reasons. Now that the operations are over, the Government will release the details of her disclosures, together with Mohd Yunus Lebai's disclosures in an addendum tomorrow.

The Marxist plot was not an indigenuous, independent, amateur effort at subversion. It was a CPM operation to make inroads into English-educated groups using English-educated intellectuals. That the Secretary-General of the CPM condescended to meet such a low-level activist as Mohd Yunus Lebai shows the importance which the CPM places in this effort. The CPM knows that unless it achieves this breakthrough it cannot survive as an effective force in Malaysia and Singapore.

The Government has therefore been fully vindicated in its assessment that this was a Marxist conspiracy which had to be broken up. Now the nine ex-détainees have suddenly denied everything in their joint statement. They have suggested that the conspiracy was a fabrication by the Government to malign and intimidate innocent Singaporeans, and that all their actions were perfectly legitimate and above board. Their denial contradicts specific statements they have made and facts otherwise established in the earlier interrogations and television interviews. However, the joint statement does not state specifically which of these facts the detainees now repudiate, nor which episodes, encounters and meetings comprising the conspiracy were concocted by the Government. The Government was not even aware of some of these events before the interrogations, e.g., Vincent Cheng's meetings with Tan Wah Piow in London, and Paul Lim's meetings with Vincent Cheng and other activists in Singapore.

The nine ex-détainees all had lawyers (see Annex), and were fully advised of their rights. If their joint statement were true, the Government would have been acting in bad faith and would have abused its powers in arresting the ex-détainees under the Internal Security Act. This would constitute sufficient grounds for challenging in the Courts either the original Detention Orders, or the Suspension Directions, or the Restriction Orders. But the detainees have avoided taking their cases to the Courts; instead they remained silent for 4-10 months after their release, and then made a joint public statement. They felt no sense of urgency or passion in their complaints.

The joint statement also repeated unspecific and vague allegations of torture against the detainees. It does not name the detainees who were assaulted, nor does it provide any specific instances of or evidence for the allegations. The Government reiterates its denial that it

has assaulted or tortured any of the detainees. The detainees were examined by doctors both before and after each interrogation session. Each examination was formally recorded in the detainee's medical record card. No doctor reported any evidence of ill-treatment or injuries.

The Government has never denied that it uses psychological pressure to break down the defences which every detainee builds around himself, and uncover the truth that every guilty suspect wishes to conceal. However, the Government neither condones torture nor allows ISD officers to practise it. The illegal use of force is a criminal offence. As the Government has repeatedly stated, if anyone has been tortured, he or she should file a Police report, produce his evidence in a court of law, and seek redress. The detainees and their lawyers are aware of this but have not done so.

The detainees now claim that everything they did was legal and legitimate. When they claim, or worse if they truly believe, that they have done nothing wrong, there is every likelihood that they will resume their former activities. The Government must determine why they have repudiated their earlier statements and reversed their positions. It has therefore re-arrested the 8 ex-detainees who are in Singapore. In addition, it has also arrested Patrick Seong Kwok Kei, aged 34, a lawyer, in connection with the investigations.

Serious allegations have now been made that the Government fabricated the Marxist plot in order to victimize innocent Singaporeans, and tortured the detainees in order to coerce them into making false statements. The Government cannot take these allegations lightly. It therefore will appoint a Commission of Inquiry to determine the facts: whether the Marxist conspiracy was a government fabrication, the circumstances under which the nine ex-detainees have retracted their previous statements, and whether the detainees were assaulted and tortured as alleged.

The joint press statement by the nine ex-detainees is meant to generate publicity, trigger agitation by foreign human rights groups, and put pressure on the Government. No Singapore Government can afford to be deterred from using the ISA by such tactics. The Government had good reasons for arresting the Marxist conspirators in May/June 87. Should the public interest again require the Government to detain subversive elements without trial, it will do so.

20 April 1988

B8/PR/Pgs.5-11

Annex

Detainee

Lawyer

Teo Soh Lung

Subhas Anandan, Roslina Baba,  
Francis Seow

Tang Fong Har

Soh Gim Chuan

Tang Lay Lee

Leo Fernando

Ng Bee Leng

Patrick Seong

Kevin De Souza

Ronald Lee

Wong Souk Yee

Francis Seow

Chng Suan Tze

Patrick Seong

William Yap

Francis Seow

Kenneth Tsang

Subhas Anandan, Teo Soh Lung

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