**[Dr Poh Soo Kai and MHA's fiction of his involvement with the injured bomber (Part 1)](http://singaporerebel.blogspot.com/2011/09/dr-poh-soo-kai-and-mhas-fiction-of-his.html)**



[ Background : Within 24 hours following the surprise announcement on Sept 15, 2011 by Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak to abolish the Internal Security Act, Singapore's Ministry of Home Affairs issued [a press release](http://www.todayonline.com/Singapore/EDC110916-0001082/Ministry-of-Home-Affairs-press-statement-on-the-ISA) to defend the use of the ISA in Singapore. At the same time, opposition parties, civil society groups and bloggers [weigh in to call for the abolishment of the ISA](http://kirstenhan.me/2011/09/17/isa-why-are-you-still-here/). One particular letter, [signed by 16 former detainees of the ISA](http://theonlinecitizen.com/2011/09/abolish-singapore%E2%80%99s-internal-security-act/), prompted [another response](http://theonlinecitizen.com/2011/09/mhamarxist-conspirators-had-plotted-to-subvert-and-destabilise-singapore/) by the MHA, who cited the case of a detainee who had "provided medical assistance to a CPM saboteur who was hiding in Malaysia."Although MHA did not name the detainee, Dr Poh Soo Kai had in an earlier speech on 13th September rebutted these allegations against him. ]

***by Teo Soh Lung***

Dr Poh Soo Kai, Mr Lim Chin Siong and Dr Lim Hock Siew, Assistant Secretary-General, Secretary General and Central Committee Member  respectively of the Barisan Sosialis together with at least 120 of their colleagues and friends in the party and trade unions were arrested and imprisoned without trial on 2 February 1963 (Operation Cold Store). Those detained included prominent opposition politicians, doctors, lawyers, economists, teachers, journalists, trade unionists, university graduates, undergraduates and school students. They were the cream of our society. The British played a primary role in Operation Cold Store. The purpose was to prevent them from contesting in the September 1963 general election. By imprisoning the vocal and capable opposition, the British helped Lee Kuan Yew to retain power while preserving their own interest in Singapore and Malaya.

Even after the general election in September 1963, where 5 Barisan members were elected, the arrest of political opponents continued. Three of the elected Barisan Members of Parliament namely S T Bani, Lee Tee Tong and Loh Meow Gong were arrested even before they could be sworn into Parliament. Another two Barisan MPs left Singapore and did not return when the PAP government refused to give an assurance that they would not be arrested. In 1964, another 88 were arrested and detained.

Dr Poh was released after 11 years of imprisonment without trial in 1973.  Defiant, principled and courageous, he called upon the PAP government to release his comrades in prison. He and a group of friends were in the process of forming a civil rights society when he was again arrested in 1976.  The following year, his friends were also arrested and imprisoned. Dr Poh was to be detained for another 6 years, thus spending a total of 17 years of the prime of his life in jail.

On 23 September 2011, MHA issued a statement accusing Dr Poh (though he was not named) of assisting a CPM saboteur. The statement reads:

“… In 1974, one of them provided medical assistance to a CPM saboteur who was hiding in Malaysia. The saboteur had been conveying a bomb for an attack in Singapore, and was travelling along Still Road (Katong) when it detonated prematurely, injuring him and killing his two accomplices...”

Dr Poh denies providing medical assistance to the injured even though under the Hippocratic Oath he has a duty to treat an injured person, whatever his political affiliation may be. MHA’s statement referred to a fiction composed by the ISD.  That fiction imagined Dr Poh, his wife and Dr G Raman visiting Masai in Johor to treat an injured person who the ISD claimed to be a communist. Dr Raman in a statement made in 1977 (which statement  is in the possession of the Attorney General’s Chambers) had already denied visiting Masai with Dr Poh and his wife.  Further, Dr Poh’s passport which the ISD had sight of, proved that he never went to Masai. Indeed, Dr Poh has until today never visited Masai.

Below is the first of two parts of a speech delivered on 13 September 2011. Dr Poh spoke about his arrests and detentions. Coincidentally, he also talked about the government’s baseless allegation that he treated an alleged bomber in 1974.

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**MY ARREST AND DETENTION IN 1976**

I was detained in Operation Cold Store i.e. 2nd Feb 1963, and released at the end of 1973. On the day of my release, I was advised by a very senior ISD officer that on release I should not publicize nor seek the release of my comrades in detention. It was not only dangerous for me but made their release more difficult. It was a friendly advice, and I believe made with good intentions.

However, I could not accept this bully-logic reflected in the thuggish policy pursued by the ISD. So on release, I met with four other comrades, P. Govindasamy, Lau Ah Lek, Fu Yang Yeow, and Tan Kim Sim, who were released on the same day, at my house. We issued a joint press statement, describing our individual detention - from three years to near 11 years - and called for the unconditional release of all detainees. We ended by calling Lee Kuan Yew a “political pimp.”

On the 11th anniversary of Operation Cold Store in 1974, I made a recorded speech of the mass arrests and a plea for support from FUEMSSO. The recorded speech was played at a meeting organized in London by FUEMSSO. I pointed out that on the very day of Operation Cold Store in 1963, Lee Kuan Yew had denied responsibility for the mass arrests in his press interview at the Singapore airport on his return from the (Internal Security Council) ISC meeting in K.L. This had infuriated Lord Selkirk who called him up, threatening to publish the relevant documents. Of course the press was blamed. In a later interview, he amended his earlier denial. However, it was clear to all, the denial was a publicity stunt to hit the headlines the day after the arrest. The subsequent correction would not have the same impact or it could even be ignored by the public.

The U.K., as chairman of the Internal Security Council (ISC), shared the responsibility for the arrests. The order for the arrests in February 1963, the carrying out of Operation Cold Store came directly from London. Selkirk and the others just enforced it. By handing the detainees over to the PAP government without first releasing them before the merger in September 1963, the U.K. shared responsibility for their continued detention. This moral responsibility cannot be shrugged off by any legalistic talk. Thus, in my speech to the FUEMSSO students in 1974, I said students in the U.K. should demand the UK government make a statement calling for their release, make their stand transparent and condemn the PAP for the continued detention of those they (the British) had earlier detained.

Later in 1974, I attended the Tokyo conference on imperialism organized by the World Council of Churches. There I described the police state that is Singapore. Friends at the Conference assured me of support should I be rearrested. During my re-arrest, these friends including some Japanese Parliamentarians, petitioned the PAP for my release.

In the same year, I met Ms Small of the International section of the British Labour Party, and a delegation of trade unionists from Sweden who were here to attend a NTUC function at Raffles Hotel. I met them separately at my home. They wanted to know more of the Internal Security Act, the conditions of detention, the people detained, the length of detention, and the conditions of release with restrictions, making of a security statement (a statement that implicates others), TV appearances, etc. I did not know then that they were planning to bring a motion asking the PAP to explain the detention, prolonged imprisonment, and ill treatment of its opponents in the forth coming Socialist International Conference to be held in Brussels in mid 1976.

Coincidentally, in early 1976 a few of us discussed the formation of a civil rights society, akin to the NGOs of today. G Raman, Ong Bock Chuan, M Fernandez, Gopinath Pillai (the PAP ambassador at large), Jing Quee, Gopal Baratham, and I had touched briefly upon the subject at a house warming party thrown by M. Fernandez.

This discussion developed into a pro-tem committee consisting of G. Raman, Michael Fernandez, Ong Bock Chuan, and I. We agreed to invite Father Joseph Ho, Dr. Gwee Ah Leng, and Dr. Un Hon Hin to join the committee. Tan Jing Quee did not join. He came to my house later with Kay Yew to express their deep concern that the PAP could use this civil rights society as a pretext for arrests. He was to be proven right.

Shortly after its formation, there was news that the Socialist International conference in Brussels would be tabling a motion asking its fraternal member, the PAP to explain the arrests without trial, and prolonged detention of political opponents.

The stage was set for our detention. By talking of civil rights, demanding the release of detainees, highlighting freedom of speech and assembly, as well as transparency and accountability to the people, we could become an embarrassment that needed to be nipped in the bud.

But how to present this as a serious threat to national security to the Singapore public and international opinion? Despite the visit of Harold Wilson, ex-Labour Party Prime Minister of Great Britain to Temasek, international opinion was unfavourable to Singapore against the backdrop of the Socialist International rapping the PAP for its long term detention without trial of its opponents. Hence, the communist bogey was invoked.

**MY  ARREST**

There was no more the knock upon the door in the wee hours of the morning. The ISD officers were waiting for me at the car park of my flat. As I came down the flight of steps to enter my car at about 7.30 a.m., I was approached by a couple of men who identified themselves as police officers. They said I was under arrest, but I would have to lead them back to the flat. When we entered my flat, they immediately closed all the windows. They were afraid neighbors would notice. They searched my study and took a few things away. Then as we were leaving, I asked if I could write a note to my wife, Grace, who had gone to work some half hour earlier. I wrote that the ISD had come. She should be brave and that I loved her. Inspector Lim read the note. He commented that we had been expecting the arrest. I nodded.

That I would be arrested was no secret. The PAP had to resign from the Socialist International as it could not honestly explain its totally undemocratic actions. Moreover, the PAP did not take well to moral pressure from any quarter. A week or so before my arrest in 1976, C.V. Devan Nair was dispatched to the Socialist International conference in Brussels to boast of his anti-colonial past, blithely ignoring the fact that experienced politicians attending the conference regarded him as a turncoat. He declared that he and I were acquainted and that I was a communist. That we were acquainted is without doubt. I had helped his family financially while he was under detention. But he should have checked with the ISD, being a turncoat and leading the PAP delegation, whether I was a communist before declaring that he knew that I was one. The ISD would have told him that it had sent me a letter through the prison authorities, in reply to my request for an issue of the Barisan Newspaper, that I am NOT a communist, and thus the request was allowed. Perhaps he was too lazy to check his accusations, or perhaps he did. That probably is a trait of a turncoat.

Devan’s allegation of me being a communist was in the headline of *The Straits Times*. It was all orchestrated. So I was expecting the arrest. Perhaps the PAP wanted me to flee, for during my interrogation, an officer made the comment that I was a Kamikaze. But he did not elaborate.

Continuing with the first day of my re-arrest, I was driven to my clinic on Balestier Road. They searched my consultation room. I do not know what they were looking for. But I was worried that they may plant ammunition there and “find” it. The thought that they were capable of fabrication was foremost in my mind, as I suddenly remembered what they said and did in Marshall’s Anson by-election of 1961. Then *The Straits Times* headlined a plot to kill the PAP ministers.  The Director of the Special Branch, Mr. G Bogaars, personally led a raid on a house in Telok Kurau – not far from my place. Some men were arrested, and ammunition reportedly found. Photos abound in the newspaper. All was quiet for a week or so. Then when Marshall spoke up at Anson to say he doubted the authenticity of the story, the *ST* printed, in small print and in the inside pages, a report to say that the ISD had received the information from “overzealous” police agents. Who were these overzealous police agents who had given false reports, and what happened to the ammunition found in the house – and who were their owners? Nothing more was ever disclosed.

I was led to the police car, made to put on a pair of spectacles that had a layer of foam on the inside. I was totally blinded. Even though my clinic was only a stone’s throw from the Whitley Holding Centre, it took quite a while to reach there. It was a poor attempt to disorientate me and a total waste of petrol.

After changing into a T-shirt and short cotton pants, the spectacles were now off, I was led to my cell. It was on one limb of a U-shaped single-story structure with a flat concrete roof. There were more cells on the other limb. The prison guard’s station and the lavatory occupied the junction of the two limbs. In the centre of the building was the exercise yard, fenced off on all sides from the cells. The walls were high, and you could only see angled skies and the top of distant trees. The cell measured some 5 feet by10 feet with a fixed bunk in the center. The fluorescent light was on all the time when I was in the cell. Once it blew, and all was in darkness. The guard could see nothing through the peep hole in his regular rounds. Immediately I was moved to an adjacent cell while the electrician on call promptly replaced the bulb.

My first family visit was a disaster. My younger brother, a clinical professor came to visit me. He worked as a chest physician at Tan Tock Seng Hospital.  His first question was, “Have you newspapers to read?” “No reading material,” was my reply. Click. The intercom was cut off. I was not to talk of matters in the centre. And so ended prematurely the visit for the family for the week.

I was summoned to go to an interrogation cell on the first day of my re-arrest. The guards had to be careful. If there was a red light at the end of the corridor, he had to stop, make me face the wall of the corridor, lest we run into some other escorted detainees approaching the right angle junction. New traffic rules had to be learned!!

Strange as it may seem, the officers asked no questions. We sat and looked at each other, and engaged in small talk. One told me he had recently returned from a posting in Cambodia. He was on the last plane out of Phnom Penh before the city fell. Another asked me to talk on socialism and try to convince him. I told him it is not possible unless we change places. They were friendly, but kept on telling me that if I do not write a confession I will definitely rot in prison. So I asked them to ask me questions if they want to know anything. They would not! The reply I got was that if they did, then I would know what they knew of me! So we sat there from about 6.00 a.m. to midnight staring at each other. They placed a small clock on the table and told me I could go back to my cell only at midnight. That kind of interrogation went on daily for the six months I was in Whitley Road Detention Centre.

The interrogation rooms were cold. For the evening session, the officers came in warm clothing while I shivered. Going back to the cell, however, was not comfortable either. It was terribly hot- like entering a furnace, more so after the cold of the interrogation room. I was most happy when it rained, for then the cell was much more comfortable. The heat did not dissipate from the poorly ventilated room until well passed 2.00 a.m.

Then one day, Deputy Director Si-Toh walked in accompanied by some 6-8 rough-looking men. They stood behind me and by my two sides. But Si Toh was polite. He asked if I had made night calls in my medical practice lately. On reflection I told him yes, one. He showed interest. Who did I attend to? It was a tenant on the ground floor who had abdominal pain. Any more night calls? No. Disappointment showed in his face. Did I send out letters lately? I did. I knew then that my letter to Lin Chew after the PAP’s walk-out from the Socialist International had been intercepted. In the letter, I had told her that I agreed with the Socialist International’s move to ask the PAP to explain its detention of political opponents, but I told her that she was not to worry over me. The PAP would have to find a scapegoat for that humiliation and I was prepared for it. Maybe because they had intercepted my letter, they did not ask me questions regarding Lin Chew or the Socialist International.

And then suddenly the door of the interrogation room was flung open and H.H was pushed in, onto the floor. I know him. He was an ex-detainee. An honest man but I had suspected that he had links with the Singapore Revolutionary Party, an organization I would not touch.  He was my patient. They had beaten him up and he was in bad shape. He looked at me and said sorry to me. Though he did not finish his sentence, I surmised that he must have told the ISD that I had given him medicine for the injured bomber. (A year back, two bombers attempted to attack the Nanyang Shoe Factory but the home-made bomb went off in the attackers’ car while they were driving to the factory, killing the driver and injuring the other bomber.)  I told HH not to worry, just tell them the truth. After that they dragged HH out of the room. They never interrogated me about the prescription but I was not concerned as the drugs were prescribed for HH’s flu symptoms. In fact, the ISD officers had gone to my clinic and taken H H’s medical case notes and a few days later, they showed me my own prescription for HH. Thus the poker game they played with me ended on an anti-climax note for the ISD.

Back to waiting for the clock to strike midnight. But there was one incident I must tell you. One day I was brought to the upper floor of the interrogation block. The Nepalese guard, the ghurka, stood outside the closed door. I was alone in the room. Suddenly I heard an extremely loud stamping of the boot in salute. The door was opened  and expecting some big shot to come in – thus the  unusually extra loud salute—I turned my head to look at the entrance. In walked a man, spotlessly dressed, in his late thirties, perhaps early forties. He was alone and that was unusual, because very senior officers nearly always come in pairs. He walked round to the other side of the table, pulled out the chair and sat down. He smiled, and said “Dr. Poh, may I call you Dr. Poh”. We were given numbers, and were never addressed by name. He was trying to be polite and nice. My reply was, “Of course you can.” Then the next question made my day. He asked, “Dr. Poh, now what is your story?” My reply was direct, “what story do you want?” He knew he had lost. He got up and stiffly walked out of the room.

After some months, I was transferred to Moon Crescent Center. A few weeks in a three-cell block with friends, then solitary in a big 8-cell block.

In early February 1977, the ISD officers informed me of my wife’s, Grace, detention. They said I could visit her at Whitley Road Detention Centre. She had just been arrested. I knew that her detention was aimed at me. I would not let them enjoy and exploit my discomfort. I turned down the offer to see my wife. She was detained for a month, with days and nights in the cold interrogation room.

Also, some time in early February 1977, I heard of the arrest of my friends, G. Raman (who was my lawyer), A. Mahadeva, Jing Quee, Kay Yew, Joethy, etc.

Then through the prison grapevine, came the news that in an arranged BBC interview, Lee Kuan Yew had said that G.Raman had sworn an affidavit that he, Grace and I had gone one night to treat an injured man in Masai, Johor. That G. Raman, a senior lawyer held under detention, had been brought under guard – though Lee Kuan Yew took pains to stress that there were no uniformed officers around – to the magistrate court to swear an affidavit, testified to the contemptuous attitude Lee had of Singapore’s judiciary.

And so Lee declared that based upon Raman’s affidavit, he would let the Singapore Medical Council (SMC) judge me. I would be judged by my peers. Presumably, Lee thought that this would satisfy some of the critics of my arrest.

But this was all a public relations exercise. Fabricate a story, hog the headlines, then quietly forget it. The SMC was never instructed by the government to summon me for an enquiry. I received no request to appear before the SMC.

In fact, my copy of the newspaper of the BBC interview was censored. Why keep me in the dark when I would be appearing before the Medical Council and be judged by my peers? The sad thing is, up to quite recently, I was surprised to hear a young friend telling me that it is the ethical duty of every doctor to treat any injured person anywhere. If there was an injured person in Masai, going to Masai was perfectly right and ethical. The young friend could not believe his ears when I told him that up till today, I had not been to Masai. He must be wondering, what other nonsense and myths he had believed in since his school days. He thanked me for waking him up.

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