



## Emergency committee for human rights in Singapore

UPDATE NO. 21  
SINGAPORE HUMAN RIGHTS ALERT

13 MAY 1988

Now detained without trial: 9 ex-detainees  
2 defence lawyers

### THE GRAND ELECTION STRATEGY

#### THE SCENARIO: FROM MARXIST PLOT TO CIA PLOT

<u>Events</u>	<u>Govt (GOS) Strategy</u>
<u>April 18</u> : 9 ex-detainees issue joint statement declaring innocence & claiming coercion.	[GOS loses political credibility/initiative]
<u>April 19</u> : 8 ex-detainees & defence lawyer arrested, interrogated incommunicado. Other ex-d's questioned under threat of re-arrest.	↓ CRITICS SILENCED QUICKLY
<u>April 28</u> : Govt of Singapore (GOS) issues statement informing of Statutory Declarations signed by detainees; GOS claims SD's are retractions of April 18 joint statement which GOS now says was politically motivated to embarrass it.	↓ ATTEMPT TO NEUTRALISE DETAINEES' STATEMENT.
Promised commission of inquiry into ex-d's statement cancelled.	↓ GROUND PREPARED FOR COUNTER-ATTACK
GOS statement includes reference to foreign interference & unknown "prime movers", saying foreigners "have no role, <u>not even as bankers to Singaporean participants</u> ".	↓ THE SET-UP.
<u>April 29</u> : GOS ministers begin to stress foreign interference.	↓ NET THROWN WIDE.
	↓

\* Jim Anderson M.P. \* Jocelyn Armstrong \* Katie Bosnas \* Prof J Burrows \* Very Rev Dr Alan Brash \* Jan Cornack \* Fr John Curnow \* Sonja Davies M.P. \* Manuka Henare \* Canon Hone Kaa \*  
\* Michael Knowles \* Margaret Lovell-Smith \* Archbishop Alan McKenzie \* Sir Guy Powles \* Rev Barbara Stephens \* Rev David M Taylor \* Bishop Whakahuiri Vercoe \*

<u>May 6:</u> Habeas corpus hearing adjourned. US foreign observer meets Prime Minister. Defence counsel, Mr Francis SEOW, arrested under Internal Security Act (ISA).	↓ COUNTER-ATTACK BEGINS.
<u>May 7:</u> GOS announces expulsion of US diplomat Hendrickson for interference in domestic politics, specifically contacts with defence lawyers SEOW and SEONG. Innuendo that Hendrickson offered financial support for them to run for parliament.	↓ BIG RED HERRING CAUGHT FOR DI- VERSION & TO IMPLICATE MORE PEOPLE.
<u>May 8:</u> Harvard grad. ex-detainee Mr CHEW Kheng Chuan rearrested. GOS innuendo that US diplomat paid off Seow's alleged debts. GOS ministers state that link between "Marxist plot" and US-CIA plot is the joint statement of the ex-d's on April 18.	↓ INITIATIVE RE-TAKEN MAJOR POLITICAL OPPONENT ELIMINATED (ie SEOW). ↓ SYNTHESIS OF GOS STRATEGY/PLOT
<u>May 10 on:</u> MPs vent heated anti-US rhetoric. GOS-organised union meetings against US & for the ISA.	↓ THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN? ↓ ?

#### HABEAS CORPUS HEARING

On the morning of May 6, Justice LAI Kew Chai in the High Court of Singapore adjourned the hearing of habeas corpus writs for 7 detainees on a technicality. He wanted the writs served directly on more govt representatives such as the Attorney-General, the Commissioner of Police and the Minister of Home Affairs. The suggestion of defence counsel Mr Francis Seow that the Minister of Trade and Industry, Brig Gen LEE Hsien Loong - the PM's son, also be served with the writ created a stir of amusement but was not accepted by the judge. The new hearing was set down for May 18. The courtroom was packed for the occasion. (A habeas corpus writ claims wrongful arrest and demands immediate release.)

The writs have very little chance of success when the govt claims that indefinite detention without trial is legal under the Internal Security Act. The protracted proceedings will have little bearing on the govt's political strategy but will, at least, give the detainees some access to the outside world through their legal representation. The hearings also provide a way of keeping the detentions before the international public.

#### FOREIGN OBSERVERS PRESENT

Observers were sent to the hearing by several organisations: Mr Jerome Cohen, a former Director of East Asian Legal Studies at Harvard and now head of an international law firm in Hongkong, represented the Washington-based human rights organisation ASIA WATCH; Ms Jill Spruce, a UK lawyer also working in Hongkong,

represented the Geneva-based International Commission of Jurists; Mr Jim Anderton, NZ member of parliament and govt member of the foreign affairs select committee, represented this NZ Emergency Committee; and Mr Udo Janz, a staff member of Amnesty International's London headquarters represented that organisation. [Diplomatic observers from some embassies were also said to be present.]

The NGO observers were also able to meet with defence lawyers, detainees' families and church people. They attended a mass for the detainees which filled a large church. Mr Jim Anderton was able to meet with the former president of Singapore, Mr Devan Nair. Govt officials refused to meet with the observers with one exception. Mr Jerome Cohen, a personal acquaintance of both the Attorney-General and the Prime Minister was able to meet them both as well as the Minister of Home Affairs.

#### DEFENCE COUNSEL ARRESTED UNDER ISA

After the hearing on May 6, defence counsel Mr Francis SEOW was informed by the secret police that he could see his two detainee clients to take instructions (lawyers and Law Society Council members Mr Patrick SEONG and Ms TEO Soh Lung). However, the Internal Security police arrested him when he arrived at the prison and he never saw his clients. Mr Seow was arrested and detained incommunicado under the Internal Security Act "for purposes of investigation into foreign interference in Singapore's internal affairs".

This arrest occurred late afternoon at the same time that Mr Jerome Cohen was seeing the Prime Minister and receiving his assurances of the propriety of the govt's actions. This was a calculated slap in the face for Mr Cohen, the USA and the other observers. The Govt thus repeated its strategy of arresting any defence lawyer who is fearless and competent.

Other factors also impinge on 59 year-old Mr Seow's arrest. He is a former solicitor-general of Singapore who fell out with the Prime Minister years ago after being one of his favourites. The PM passed special legislation two years ago to push Mr Seow out of the presidency of the Law Society and the latter's intention to stand for election as an independent in the forthcoming elections was widely known. Mr Seow is articulate and persuasive in public. The govt has thus removed a tangible political threat.

#### A DIFFERENT GENERATION, A BIGGER GAME

It should be noted that Mr SEOW is a completely different generation from the other detainees. Mr SEOW is used to personal administrative power and political rivalry. The other detainees are young, have been working with community groups at a local level and have a more community-oriented approach to politics.

In the political chess game, this difference means that you need a bigger piece to wipe Mr SEOW off the board. A small pawn

studying in Oxford can be smeared with the "communist" label and used to wipe off 22 young community workers. But to eliminate Mr SEOW from the game you need a big chess piece and a capitalist one.

#### US DIPLOMAT EXPELLED

On May 7 the Singapore govt protested against the alleged activities of US Embassy First Secretary E. Mason Hendrickson and requested his withdrawal. The US Govt denied the charges against the diplomat but agreed to withdraw him. The Singapore govt statement charged that Mr Hendrickson had interfered in its domestic politics by meeting with lawyers including Mr Seow and Mr Seong and encouraging them to run for parliament. The govt statement also implies, but does not explicitly say, that Mr Hendrickson offered lawyers money for their campaigns. (It seems he may have ventured the opinion that "money should not be a problem" which, of course, it is not for well-off Singaporean lawyers.)

The basis for the govt charges is another sworn statement by detained defence lawyer Patrick Seong. Dated 3 May this statement comes 5 days after the Ministry of Home Affairs statement of 28 April which was supposed to justify the re-arrest of the 8 ex-detainees and the arrest of Patrick Seong. This 28 April statement concluded with a section headed "Foreign Groups: Stay Out" warning against foreign interference and saying darkly "The govt has reasons to believe the prime movers of the Joint Statement are not amongst the 9 detainees who signed the Joint Statement." The secret police then busied themselves interrogating Patrick Seong until he broke down and agreed to sign a statement implicating the US diplomat in the way prescribed.

#### ANOTHER EX-DETAINEE ARRESTED

Harvard graduate and businessman, ex-detainee Mr CHEW Kheng Chuan was arrested on the morning of May 8. His re-arrest was stated to be due to his alleged role in drafting the April 18 statement of the detainees. His re-arrest was also another slap at the US because of the influential Harvard support lobby which rallied behind Mr CHEW when he was first arrested last year.

#### US EXPELS SINGAPORE DIPLOMAT

On May 10, Mr Charles Redman of the US Dept of State in Washington announced that his govt had requested the withdrawal of First Secretary Robert H.K. CHUA from the Singapore Embassy. Mr Redman recalled the strong ties with Singapore "which we have regarded as among our strongest friends in East Asia" and stated, "We are therefore both shocked and puzzled at the allegations which have been made against us and which, I have noted, we reject in toto." He said Mr Hendrickson had served with distinction in Singapore.

In its 10 May report of this expulsion of Mr CHUA, Reuters agency noted, "The US is the source of almost half of all private

foreign investment in Singapore and about 30 per cent of total investment, according to official US figures."

#### NOBEL PEACE PRIZE FOR SINGAPORE

NZ member of parliament, Mr Jim Anderton, has suggested that Singapore be nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize because it is the first country to get the USSR and the USA to cooperate in the same conspiracy.

The prestigious conservative Hongkong daily, the SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST, on May 9 quoted Western diplomats' laconic understatement that "they found it difficult to believe US involvement in a Marxist plot".

#### FAMILIES REJECT S.D.s

Well before this international disbelief surfaced, there was a rejection of the basis of the govt "foreign interference" line. On 28 April, 6 of the detainees' families signed a letter rejecting the detainees' statutory declarations. "We reject the Statutory Declarations based on the fact that our loved ones were, for ten days, and are still at the mercy of their interrogators and denied access to family and counsel. We maintain that they are innocent and demand their immediate and unconditional release."

The following day, 29 April, Mr Francis SEOW, already under attack for his outspoken statements (the Attorney-General was threatening to lay a complaint with the Law Society that Mr Seow had exceeded his responsibilities as counsel) issued another press statement which began, "What happened to Tan Wah Piow and the Marxist conspiracy? Last week the Government said that the 8 detainees were re-arrested because their repudiation of their statements during detention meant that they were likely to return to their subversive activities. The Government also attempted to link their re-arrests to some vague CPM [Communist Party of Malaya] conspiracy in Malaysia. After more than a week's silence, the Government has abandoned the Marxist theory and now seeks to pin the blame for the detainees' statement on the detainees' lawyers. Not an unknown tactic."

Mr SEOW went on to deny any involvement in the production of the detainees' joint statement and to make it clear that he was against the abuse of the Internal Security Act, not its proper use.

#### THE MISSING LINK

It is the link between the so-called Marxist plot and the new US-CIA one which the govt is at pains to establish. The Marxist plot fabrication was already the subject of international disbelief and derision. Now the Singapore govt claims there is a link to the capitalist plot. That link, said Deputy PM GOH Chok Tong and Brig Gen LEE Hsien Loong on May 8, is the joint statement of the 9 ex-detainees proclaiming their innocence. The two ministers state that the 9 ex-detainees were used by foreign

forces to put pressure on the govt by making the statement and influencing the forthcoming elections in favour of opposition lawyers being promoted by these outsiders.

Not to miss the chance of smearing as many international human rights groups and concerned foreign govts as possible, the govt has said that it is convinced that others, besides the Americans, are involved. It will no doubt announce who these groups are at politically convenient times in what must now be regarded as its election campaign. The detainees are still under intensive interrogation 3 weeks after their re-arrest and we can expect more coerced statements from them.

#### THE DIVERSION

The Singapore govt clearly decided to create a colourful diversion from the damning statement of the ex-detainees and their subsequent re-arrest. The creation of a straw enemy and engaging it in a mock David versus Goliath battle also provides a populist, if unbelievable, issue on which to go to the polls. Alleging foreign interference also has the advantage of diverting attention from the govt's own record.

#### THE SET-UP

The detention of Francis SEOW not only renders legal representation at the next habeas corpus hearing a major difficulty. Immediate innuendo against him in the press on 8 May (his marital status, his alleged indebtedness and questions about how he managed to pay off his debts) set him up for needing US bribes as were alleged to be offered by the expelled US diplomat.

The arrest of Mr CHEW (along with his Harvard thesis which refers to Marxist social analysis among other kinds) will no doubt provide another link point between the American plot and the previous Marxist one. Mr CHEW will be under heavy interrogation at the moment to get him to "reveal" whatever "links" are convenient for the Singapore govt's fiction.

The allegations against Mr Hendrickson to date, even if true, amount only to normal diplomatic activity of meeting with all sections of Singapore society and gathering political information openly. He no doubt gave some personal opinions to the lawyers he met (although some of those lawyers named by Patrick Seong vociferously deny meeting the diplomat at all) but this again is hardly unusual. In fact, the US Embassy has played a very low-key role throughout the entire "conspiracy" period since May 21 last year. It had no reason to do anything else considering Singapore's complete pro-US foreign policy. The allegations against Mr Hendrickson are thus correctly seen by all observers as being contrived for domestic political purposes. The joint statement by the detainees on April 18 was a major embarrassment and political setback for the Singapore govt. It had to find a way to take the political initiative back again. It has done so by creating an international wrangle and acting as the aggrieved party.

#### THE PRIME MINISTER'S GAMBLE

PM Lee Kuan Yew has clearly been very worried about the next elections since his party lost a lot of support in the last ones (while still picking up all but 2 of the seats). The gerrymandering of the electoral system this year has almost certainly ensured no more opposition members will be elected. However, he is probably not content with that. Typically, he would want to be seen as morally right and would not want the detainees' declaration of innocence and coerced confession to stand.

He may have calculated that Singapore can afford to expend a bit of its political capital in bashing the US in order to drum up xenophobic sympathy at the polls and to discredit the detainees' statement as a plant by the US. He must also be gambling on Vice-President George Bush's election to the US presidency. Mr LEE has known Mr Bush personally at least since the latter's term as head of the CIA. It is also true that Singapore is hardly a major concern of the US and the forthcoming transition in the US administration will give enough lead time for Mr LEE to achieve his immediate domestic goals. The removal of Singapore by the US from its preferential tariff list (GSP) for 3rd world countries' imports earlier this year means that there is no obvious lever for the US to use now.

But this strategy is still a gamble and has many points at which it may come unstuck. Already there may be fewer reasons for the US to consider Singapore as a primary ally within ASEAN. There are also indications that the alienation of the Singapore populace from the PAP govt has increased rather than decreased.

#### THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN SO FAR

The election campaign is now in full swing with the controlled STRAITS TIMES giving pages to govt press releases on foreign interference and to govt MPs who are lining up obediently to condemn the US with extravagant rhetoric. These MPs are usually never heard from so one must assume that there is a pre-election need to give them some personal exposure. A sample of these officially promoted slogans: "It is disappointing that our opposition both inside and outside the house are fighting for the Americans." "The US has a history of interference in other countries. Look at Vietnam, Cambodia, Iran, Panama and even the Philippines. These countries suffered a worse fate after US involvement." "If we follow the American style, we will experiment with glue and heroin before saying that it is not good." The US bureaucracy is "sneaky, arrogant and untrustworthy ... We do not trust the US bureaucracy."

On the morning of 11 May the STRAITS TIMES was able to predict how many workers would attend a spontaneous rally against the US later that day. The headline was "4,000 to hold protest rally against US". The secretary-general of the National Trade Union

Congress (NTUC) is Mr ONG Teng Cheong, Second Deputy Prime Minister.

The govt is also making out that the Internal Security Act was a vital piece of legislation needed to flush out what Mr Hendrickson was saying to lawyers over tea in a first-class hotel. Ministers are saying the ISA is an election issue knowing that the govt will win the elections resoundingly. This will then enable them to say that the ISA has been approved by all Singaporeans. They can then claim to have the moral justification to keep the detainees inside for ever.

#### SINGAPORE OPPOSITION PARTY SPEAKS OUT

The sole opposition member of parliament, Mr CHIAM See Tong of the Singapore Democratic Party, said on May 8 that the issue facing Singapore was not the case against the US diplomat but the arbitrary arrests of the 8 ex-detainees and the 2 lawyers under the Internal Security Act. He said also, "How can the people of Singapore be expected to believe the word of Patrick Seong when his statutory declaration was obtained while he was under detention and the Government has admitted the use of psychological pressure on detainees?" He noted that foreign interference in domestic affairs was unacceptable but "the SDP cannot accept the evidence of Patrick Seong alleging that Hank Hendrickson interfered in Singapore's domestic politics, which was obtained while he was under great duress."

The next day a govt minister launched a scathing attack on Mr CHIAM for not accepting the govt "evidence" and protesting foreign interference vigorously.

#### FOREIGN REACTION

On April 28, Dante B FASCELL, Chairperson of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the US HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES wrote to PM LEE Kuan Yew expressing "my personal concern over the detention without trial last week of eight former detainees and their attorney". He noted the continuing detention of Vincent CHENG and urged the PM to afford the detainees "a fair trial under the safeguards of international law, or to release them promptly".

On May 5, the US DEPT OF STATE informed the human rights organisation, ASIA WATCH, that it had told the Singapore Govt of its deep concern over the arrest of Patrick Seong and the rearrest of the 8 detainees. It also stated its intention to have a US Embassy officer observe the court proceedings.

On May 7 in Bangkok, the THAI HUMAN RIGHTS SUPPORT GROUP FOR SINGAPORE DETAINEES presented a petition to the Singapore Embassy expressing concern about the re-arrest of the detainees.

On May 7, a joint statement by 18 MALAYSIAN OPPOSITION POLITICAL PARTIES AND SOCIAL ACTION GROUPS called on Singapore to release Mr SEOW describing his arrest as "another brutal assault on basic

freedoms and democracy in Singapore calculated to intimidate citizens who dare to speak the truth". They also called for the release of the other political detainees.

Also on May 7, the AUSTRALIAN "COMMITTEE OF 100 FOR FREEDOM OF THE SINGAPORE 10" ran a 3-column advertisement in the country's only national daily newspaper, THE AUSTRALIAN. It was headed "SINGAPORE? UNTIL JUSTICE - NO TOURISTS" and spokesperson Father Bob Wilkinson said, "Until the Singapore 10 are unconditionally released or granted an impartial trial, we call on all Australians to campaign against Singapore as a tourist carrier or a tourist destination." The Committee has several senators and MPs among its supporters.

On May 10, the AUSTRALIAN GOVT called in Singapore's High Commissioner in Canberra to express its "considerable concern". An Australian spokesperson reported the meeting, "We said we viewed with concern and regret any government that saw fit to use arbitrary detentions. We believe these quite clearly have occurred under Singapore's Internal Security Act."

On April 21, the SINGAPORE DETAINEES VIGIL COMMITTEE (Adelaide, Australia) held its monthly vigil outside the Singapore Airlines office in Adelaide. Radio and TV reported the vigil. Another will be held on May 21.

From April 19 until May 9, the NZ CATHOLIC COMMISSION FOR EVANGELISATION, JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT has written several times to Singapore High Commissioner, Mr CHIA Cheong Fook, criticising the arrests and the abuse of human rights. A terse reply was received on 5 May from the High Commissioner stating "The matter is an internal issue for Singaporeans to decide upon."

The NEW ZEALAND LAW SOCIETY on 5 May wrote to PM LEE Kuan Yew supporting the letter to him by LAWASIA (27 April) and asking him to ensure "that the detainees are either charged and brought to trial expeditiously or released forthwith". A copy was sent to the Singapore High Commissioner in NZ with the comment "...it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the arrests have been inspired by political motives and are aimed at repressing what, in this country, would be regarded as legitimate free speech. Whilst acknowledging that different cultural and geopolitical factors may have an influence in your country, such a conclusion must inevitably lead to a diminution of Singapore's international reputation."

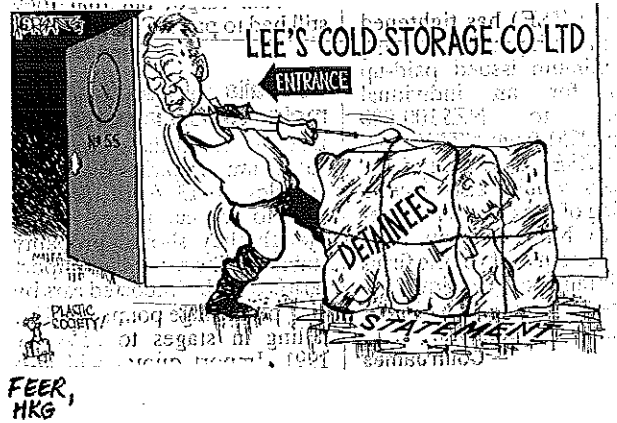
On 10 May the Society's President sent a letter to PM LEE saying that the arrest of Mr Seow appeared to offend against "a fundamental principle of the Rule of Law that persons detained by the State have a right to be represented by legal counsel of their choosing and that legal counsel should be free to represent clients without threat of interference or intimidation.." The letter requested Mr Seow's charging with an offence before a court or his release from custody forthwith.

In the process of building public protest against the detentions, the TOKYO group is changing its name from "Save the Singapore Sixteen" to "Voice of the Political Detainees in Singapore".

**MEDIA COMMENT**

Again there has been so much media coverage that we reproduce only an editorial from the SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST (Hongkong) on May 9.

EMERGENCY COMMITTEE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN SINGAPORE,  
P O BOX 28-100, CHRISTCHURCH, AOTEAROA - NEW ZEALAND.



FEER, HKG

Founded in 1903

MONDAY, MAY 9, 1988

## No room for rights in hardline Singapore

RELATIONS between the United States and Singapore are now certain to chill following the forced removal over the weekend of a US diplomat for allegedly meddling in the island state's internal politics. It is another sorry chapter in Singapore President Lee Kuan Yew's seeming paranoia over supposed plots to subvert his government, and an alleged international conspiracy orchestrated by the press to undermine its reputation.

While the forced removal of US Political First Secretary E. Mason Hendrickson is likely to cause diplomatic tensions between the two countries, it more importantly highlights the growing concern not only over Mr Lee's obsessions, but also the decline in human rights in his country.

On Friday, a former solicitor-general of Singapore, barrister Francis Seow, was arrested shortly after lodging a petition to the High Court for the release of two political detainees. Mr Seow was detained under the same controversial law under which his clients were rounded up — the Internal Security Act which gives the authorities the right to hold without charge or trial those regarded as a threat to the State. The two detainees were among eight arrested last month after accusing the authorities of ill treatment and torture when held earlier over an alleged Marxist plot to destabilise the Government.

The last two years have also seen an intensification of Singapore's confrontation with the world's press, claiming it has attempted to interfere in internal affairs. Since the 1986 amendments to the Newspaper and Printing Press Act, such publications as *Time* magazine, the *Asian Wall Street Journal*, *Asiaweek* and the *Far Eastern Economic Review* have been penalised by having distribution trimmed or banned for supposed meddling.

The Singapore Government has found that it cannot impose the same controls on the foreign media as it does its own. It has continually resisted the concept of a free press as "practised in the West" but it has taken its fear of scrutiny to the extreme and the

under the guise of economic penalties, with the Government arguing that its actions have been to cut the profits of alleged transgressors rather than to restrict the circulation of information. In an attempt to prove this, the Government in one case amended laws to allow the photocopying of the publication for distribution, a clear breach of international copyright law.

The detention of lawyers and members of religious groups and the ban on international media say little for human rights, the independence of law making or the judiciary in the country. President Ronald Reagan once saluted Singapore as a bastion of democratic virtues; it boasts a British-type system of justice with appeals allowed to the Privy Council in London. However, the problem in Singapore is not the legal system, it is the system within which it operates. The island state is served by the trappings of democracy but not necessarily by the principles of freedom that Mr Lee occasionally claims for the benefit of the West.

Mr Lee's administration is popular because the country is clean, physically and morally, and is prosperous and stable. Domestically, Mr Lee has wide support, being seen as a leader who has made the country strong during its short history. His sole interest is to advance his vision of a thriving Singapore, even though it may be out of step with its international friends.

Certainly, Singapore is only one of many countries in Asia which control their media, are suspicious of Western media influences and have strict internal security laws. Why Singapore continually faces criticism is that it imposes its principles in an arbitrary manner, often irrespective of human rights, and with an arrogant disregard for any condemnation its actions may bring. The international perspective of this is, in reality, working against Singapore's best interests; while many of those other countries in the region which practise similar policies are moving towards legally enshrining basic rights and press freedoms, Singapore seems set on other direction. It is to the detriment.

SCMP, HONG KONG, 9 MAY, 88