

Mr Chiam's questions on Mas Selamat Kastari - Wong: Answered 3 years ago in Parliament

Three years ago, Parliament debated the escape of MSK, and the issue of accountability. Three years later, Mr Chiam says he wasn't satisfied with my answers to his questions. This is after he decided to contest Bishan-Toa-Payoh GRC.

The fact is I apologised on 29 Feb 2008 in Parliament, one day after MSK escaped. Once the COI findings were completed on 21 Apr 2008, I gave a full account in Parliament, and answered all the questions posed by MPs for more than two hours. Mr Chiam was present. He focused on the use of tracker dogs for the search. I attached a transcript from the Parliament records. I responded to all his questions. He didn't speak again in the other five Parliamentary debates on MSK.

MSK was eventually found and arrested in Malaysia through information provided by the Singapore authority. Meanwhile, the system and processes within the Home Team were promptly tightened. This is how we account to Singaporeans who had cooperated and supported us, despite the inconveniences from the heightened security measures. We came out stronger.

Mr Chiam says that he is waiting for GE to raise the issues of MSK. Voters of Bishan-Toa Payoh can see for themselves whether SPP is contesting BTP GRC because it has their welfare in mind and has concrete plans to improve their lives? OR because it is capitalizing on a lapse in an attempt to get into Parliament

EXTRACTS OF THE MINISTERIAL STATEMENT ON "COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY FINDINGS ON MAS SELAMAT KASTARI'S ESCAPE" on 21 APR 2008

The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs (Mr Wong Kan Seng): Mr Speaker, Sir, on Wednesday 27th February 2008, ISA detainee Mas Selamat bin Kastari escaped from the Whitley Road Detention Centre (WRDC). A day after his escape, **I apologised in this House for what had happened, and promised that in due course I would give a full account of his escape.** At that point, the full facts had yet to be fully established. I repeated this assurance a fortnight later, telling Singaporeans that after the Committee of Inquiry (COI) completed its work, I would give a full account of how Mas Selamat escaped and what would be done to prevent another escape.

...

Enforcing discipline and disciplinary action

I have directed the Commissioner of Police and Director ISD to investigate the operational lapses related to the escape and to ascertain accountabilities, taking into account the findings of the COI and the CID reports. **Officers who are responsible for Mas Selamat's escape will be disciplined and penalised. In this connection, I have asked Director ISD to examine the roles not only of the WRDC junior officers but also to go up the chain of command and include the supervisory and management levels of WRDC as well.** There is a proper process for disciplinary action under civil service or Police Force rules and this must take its course.

I have also instructed the Commissioner of Police and Director ISD to **replace all the officers at WRDC responsible for Mas Selamat's escape** as identified in the COI report.

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Mr Chiam See Tong (Potong Pasir): Sir, I would like to ask the Minister whether tracker dogs were used to hunt the escaped terrorist. If so, was it successful?

Mr Wong Kan Seng: The moment the escape happened, the first thing that was done by the Whitley Road Detention Centre guards was to have a guard turnout, stand to, and they turned up quickly went outside the fence of Whitley

Road Detention Centre and did a thorough search. There were ISD officers and over time there were also police officers.

I am told that when there are such movements and plenty of people in the search area, it will not be of value to deploy the tracker dogs because the tracker dogs simply cannot operate with so many human beings around and having trampled over the place. It is just simply impossible for the dogs to work. But in other areas, tracker dogs have been in place. For example, not far from the Whitley Road area, tracker dogs were in place and ready to be deployed.

In fact, I said earlier that at 4.35 pm, the Gurkha trackers – these are special people trained to track the jungle and forest – were already on the ground operating in the terrain which is wooded, uneven and it is difficult to manoeuvre, and they were in place at 4.35 pm.

Mr Chiam See Tong: Thank you, Sir, for giving me this opportunity to ask my question.

Sir, I know that **DPM has mentioned that disciplinary actions shall be taken** against certain officers **but, nevertheless, I would still like to ask him whether any heads will roll** after the escape of Mas Selamat because this is a serious security breach.

Sir, **I am not happy about the answer he gave on the use of tracker dogs.** I thought that was the most suitable occasion that tracker dogs would have been used. Probably if we have used tracker dogs Mas Selamat would now be in custody.

Mr Wong Kan Seng: May I ask Mr Chiam whether he is an expert on tracker dogs?

Mr Chiam See Tong: Dogs have got 20 times stronger smell than human beings. **Have Members watched the movie about the early southern states where these slaves used to escape and these dogs would go after them?** They got no chance of running away even if they tried to go through the swamps. In this case it is the same thing. Mas Selamat would be going ahead and we have five sniff dogs chasing after him. Whether he goes into the bush or climb a tree, I think he will not escape.

Mr Wong Kan Seng: Sir, I am no expert in tracker dogs. I could only inform Members what I am advised by professionals and, as I have explained the moment the escape was discovered, the guards turned out and searched the area. There were lots of people on the ground and I am also advised by professional opinion that in those situations no additional value would be added by tracker dogs. I am also told that tracker dogs were deployed in certain locations in the vicinity of the Whitley Road Detention Centre.

Mr Chiam's first question on whether "heads will roll", as I have said there will be disciplinary proceedings, and we must let that proceedings run its course and **those who were found accountable and liable will have to answer for those mistakes or lapses.**

Mr Chiam See Tong: The DPM says that there were a lot of people and everybody was stepping on the ground. That will not confuse the dogs. In fact, this is a good case for using tracker dogs because his trousers were there and left a scent and, secondly, he could run very fast. The dogs will outrun him anytime, because he had a fall, he sprained his leg and he was limping. **So, this is a case for tracker dogs to come in. I have tried to convince DPM but he does not seem to be impressed by what I said.**

Mr Wong Kan Seng: No, Sir, it is not because I am not convinced. **I will pass Mr Chiam's view and his knowledge about tracker dogs to the police department and I will let them assess this.** There may well be a lot of truth, there may well be a lot of insights in what Mr Chiam said, and I am no expert in this but I will convey it to the professionals for them to study and, hopefully, we will learn from this the next time too.