

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF
INQUIRY INTO THE LITTLE INDIA RIOT
ON 8 DECEMBER 2013

27 JUNE 2014

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Introduction

Appointment of the COI

1. On 13 December 2013, pursuant to Section 9 of the Inquiries Act (Cap. 139A), the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs, Mr Teo Chee Hean (the Minister), appointed and constituted a Committee of Inquiry (COI) to hold an inquiry into the riot that occurred in Little India on the night of 8 December 2013.

2. The instrument of appointment read as follows:

“I am convening a Committee of Inquiry (COI) under Section 9 of the Inquiries Act to inquire into the circumstances and management of the riot in Little India on 8 December 2013 and to recommend measures to reduce the risk of such incidents re-occurring.

I am pleased to appoint you Chairman of the COI under Section 10 of the Inquiries Act. The terms of reference and the composition of the COI are enclosed for your reference.

The proceedings of the COI will be conducted over the next six months. Further details will be provided by the secretariat shortly.”

3. The COI’s Terms of Reference (TORs) were to:

- i. Establish the factors and circumstances that led to the riot in Little India on 8 December 2013;
- ii. Establish how the riot unfolded and how the response forces managed the incident;
- iii. Consider whether current measures to manage such incidents in areas where foreign workers congregate such as Little India are adequate, and recommend any further measures to improve their management and reduce the risk of such incidents;
- iv. Conduct itself in accordance with the provisions of the Inquiries Act; and

- v. Make and submit a report of its proceedings, findings and recommendations to the Minister for Home Affairs within six months.
4. The COI sought and received an extension of two weeks to submit its report, until 27 June 2014, to take into account important evidence gathered in June, after the public hearing.
5. The COI now submits its report.

Summary of Events

6. At about 9.20pm on 8 December 2013, a private school bus carrying over 40 South Asian foreign workers was making a sharp left turn out of Tekka Lane onto Race Course Road, one of the main roads in Singapore's Little India district. As the bus was completing its turn, a foreign worker from Tamil Nadu who had been running alongside it fell in the path of the front left wheel of the bus. He was crushed underneath the wheel and died instantly. The bus stopped immediately. The left rear wheel had by then pinned the worker's body. A crowd of foreign workers formed around the bus and began to react violently against it. Soon thereafter, the mob turned against the bus driver and the timekeeper. With the help of pro-social persons among the crowd, the bus driver and timekeeper found shelter inside the bus. The mob continued to attack the bus.

7. Responding to a 999 call about the bus accident, officers from the Singapore Police Force (SPF) and Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF) and arrived shortly. They first extricated the dead body and removed it from the scene. Then, the SCDF and SPF officers, again with the help of pro-social persons in the crowd, rescued the bus driver and the timekeeper and took them away from the hostile mob. This was followed by a brief lull, during which time much of the mob moved away.

8. Subsequently, a concentrated group of rioters appeared. They became hostile and aggressive towards the SPF and SCDF officers. Particularly, SPF and SCDF vehicles – police cars, police motorcycles, ambulances and more – became the target of their violence. Vehicles were attacked and overturned; some were burned. This continued until troops from the Special Operations Command (SOC), a specialist SPF squad trained in riot control, arrived at the scene. Seeing the SOC officers, the rioters dispersed from the scene. The riot had lasted 2 hours.

9. Many aspects of the fatal accident and the riot were recorded live by closed-circuit video cameras in the area and on camera phones by residents and passers-by. Some of the latter videos were uploaded onto the Internet.

10. This accident occurred in Little India on a Sunday evening. This was a time in the week when tens of thousands of South Asian workers, mostly from Tamil Nadu, would usually go to shop, eat, socialise, and run errands in the area. The accident occurred near a bus boarding open area, where hundreds of workers were waiting to catch a bus back to their dormitories. The rioters were male foreign workers primarily from the construction industry. Not a single citizen of Singapore was involved in the riot.

11. 37 SPF officers, 12 SCDF officers, 5 private security officers from Certis CISCO¹ (CISCO), and 8 members of the public were injured in the riot. Their injuries were primarily from projectiles flung at them by the rioters, such as pieces of concrete, glass bottles, and other items the rioters could get hold of from the streets. In total, 23 emergency vehicles were damaged, 6 of which were overturned, 4 set on fire by the rioters. A fifth vehicle also sustained fire damage from a burning vehicle next to it. The property damage resulting from the riot was valued at over S\$530,000.

12. This riot, Singapore's worst major public order incident in more than four decades, was a shock to many Singaporeans. In many ways, however, it was not as severe as many other riots that have taken place in other parts of the world. There was no loss of life, no prolonged fighting between the police and rioters, and it was dispersed relatively quickly. The riot remained contained in one small area, and arson of private property and looting did not occur. No shots were fired by the police, and neither tear gas nor water cannons were used on the rioters. The overall outcome of the SPF response was good, but it would have been better had it not been for the overturning and burning of police cars, ambulances, and emergency vehicles.

13. There were two phases to the riot. The first phase was in the immediate aftermath of the fatal accident, when the rioters' anger was mainly targeted at the bus, bus driver, and timekeeper. In this phase, the first SPF, SCDF, and CISCO responders managed, with limited manpower and surrounded by a hostile crowd, to extricate the dead body and then rescue the bus driver and timekeeper from the bus, which was under attack by the rioters. It was upon the rescue of the bus driver and timekeeper that the rioters' anger turned towards the responding officers and their vehicles.

¹ Certis CISCO Security Pte Ltd is a commercial Auxiliary Police Force authorised to provide armed security officers to government and private organisations and parties in Singapore.

14. The riot thus slid into the second phase. This saw SPF officers, many of whom arrived during or towards the end of the first phase, attempting to hold positions to keep the riot from spreading, while awaiting the arrival of the SOC troops. It was during this period, from approximately 10.15pm to 10.45pm, that most of the violence and destruction took place, particularly to the emergency vehicles.

15. After the riot, many commentators, local and foreign, were eager to hypothesise on its cause. Some claimed that it was an inevitable release of pent-up anger, frustration, or resentment by foreign workers against Singapore, a result of their unhappiness with their working or living conditions here. Given the gravity of this event in modern Singaporean history, the Prime Minister of Singapore decided and declared that a COI would be appointed to look into the riot.

16. The COI now, on this 27 June 2014, presents its report in three parts. The first part of this report gives an overview of the procedures and processes undertaken in the Inquiry. The second part presents the COI's findings, firstly on the facts of the incident as it occurred on 8 December 2013, and secondly on the factors and circumstances which contributed to the riot. The third part contains the COI's recommendations, made with the aim of reducing the likelihood of a similar event occurring in Singapore again.

Part I: Procedures and Processes

Overview

Composition of the Committee of Inquiry

17. The COI comprised four members. The Chairman of the COI was a former Judge of the Supreme Court, Mr G Pannir Selvam. The other members were former Commissioner of Police Mr Tee Tua Ba, former President of the Singapore National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) Mr John De Payva, and Managing Director of SME Care Pte Ltd and Chairman of the West Coast Citizens' Consultative Committee Mr Andrew Chua Thiam Chwee. The members were selected by the Minister, the appointing authority, for their respective knowledge of the law, understanding of security operations, familiarity with workers' issues, and experience with managing community relations.

18. Mr G Pannir Selvam sat on the Supreme Court Bench from 1991 until 2001. Prior to that, he was a senior partner at Drew and Napier LLC. He was the C.J. Koh Professor of Law at the National University of Singapore from 2001 to 2002. In 2012, he was appointed by the Secretariat of the Commonwealth to co-chair the Commission of National Inquiry looking into the resignation of the President of the Maldives.

19. Mr Tee Tua Ba was the Commissioner of Police from 1992 to 1997. After his retirement, Mr Tee was appointed Singapore's High Commissioner to Brunei, and subsequently ambassador to Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates and Cyprus. He is currently Singapore's non-resident ambassador to Switzerland and Chairman of the Singapore Red Cross.

20. Mr John De Payva was the President of NTUC from 1997 to 2011. He has also served as a member in various committees such as the National Wages Council, National Productivity & Continuing Education Council and Tripartite Taskforce on Wage Restructuring. He is currently the President Emeritus of NTUC and the Secretary-General Emeritus of the Singapore Manual and Mercantile Workers' Union.

21. Mr Andrew Chua Thiam Chwee is currently the Chairman of the West Coast Citizens' Consultative Committee, a position he has served in since 2003. Formerly the Managing Director of Enterprise Banking at DBS Bank, Mr Chua is now Managing Director of SME Care Pte Ltd, which provides financing and financial advisory services for small and medium enterprises. He is also a member of the South West Community Development Council. As a grassroots

leader, he has been involved in managing relations between the community and foreign workers.

Appointment of the Central Narcotics Bureau as Investigator

22. The COI first met on 16 December 2013. At that meeting, the COI decided to appoint an investigation team, pursuant to paragraph 9 of the Schedule to the Inquiries Act, to assist the COI with gathering evidence. This team was to work under the close guidance and direction of the COI to ensure that all matters which the COI deemed relevant to its Inquiry were looked into.

23. At the request of the COI, the Public Prosecutor appointed Mr Adam bin Fashe Huddin, Director of Investigations from the Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB) and his supporting officers (collectively referred to as the Investigation Team) to investigate any matters relevant to the Inquiry on behalf of the COI. The COI was deliberate in appointing the team from an agency which had not been involved in responding to the riot, but had a strong pool of trained and experienced investigators.

Appointment of the Attorney-General to Lead Evidence

24. On 18 February 2014, the Attorney-General was appointed by the Minister to lead evidence at the public hearing of the Inquiry. The Attorney-General's Chambers team was led by Senior State Counsel Mr David Khoo.

Investigations and Inquiry

Actions Undertaken by the COI before the Public Hearing

25. Between 13 December 2013 and 19 February 2014, the COI held seven internal meetings, conducted three site visits, and spoke to many foreign workers, including some workers who were involved in the riot. The members of the COI also examined evidence from video footage, media reports, informal interviews, and other sources. The COI undertook these actions to equip itself with as much contextual information as possible ahead of the public hearing.

Interviews with Foreign Workers Issued with Warnings

26. The COI invited all 57 foreign workers who were repatriated in December 2013 for their involvement in the event to be interviewed on a voluntary basis before they departed Singapore. 20 agreed to do so. These workers spoke to the COI on 18 December 2013 and 20 December 2013. 19 of them were from Tamil Nadu in India, and 1 was from Bangladesh.

Visit to Site of the Riot

27. On 24 January 2014, the COI visited the site of the riot in Little India. The purpose of this visit was to gain a better understanding of the scene of the riot. The Investigation Team assisted the COI with a verbal re-enactment of the accident and unfolding of the riot, bringing them through the various incident spots.

Visit to Foreign Worker Dormitories and Quarters

28. On 3 February 2014, the COI visited two foreign worker dormitories and the workers' living quarters at one construction site. The purpose of this visit was two-fold. First, it was for the COI to speak informally with foreign workers and seek their views on matters relating to the riot. Second, it was for the COI to preliminarily assess claims, made in the media and by Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), that foreign workers' living and working conditions were the underlying cause of the riot.

Visit to Foreign Worker Congregation Areas

29. On 16 February 2014, a Sunday evening, the COI visited other areas where foreign workers are known to congregate: namely, Peninsular Plaza, Golden Mile Complex, and Geylang. The purpose of this visit was to get a sense

of the situation at other areas where foreign workers congregate as compared to Little India.

Submissions Received from the Public

30. Members of the public were first invited to send in their views to the COI via a Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) press release issued on 13 December 2013. This press release stated that any member of the public could write to the COI Secretariat should they wish to be represented or present evidence at the public hearing. On 14 January 2014, the COI Secretariat issued another press release reminding the public to send in any comments they had by 5 February 2014, so that the COI could consider them prior to the start of the public hearing.

31. The COI received a total of 22 emails, letters and submissions from various members of the public and NGOs prior to the public hearing. Some organisations who wished to send in detailed submissions asked for extensions to the deadline, and received them. No person or organisation was denied the opportunity of giving their views to the COI.

32. Many who wrote to the COI offered their views on possible causes of the riot, suggestions on how the situation could be improved, and personal views on community-worker relations. After studying the submissions and assessing their respective relevance to the TORs, the COI decided to invite 4 individuals and 3 NGOs who had written in to give evidence at the public hearing. The COI took into account all submissions received, whether brought to the public hearing or not, in its deliberations.

The Public Hearing

33. The public hearing was conducted in open court, with no restrictions on media or public attendance. The COI sat for a total of 24 hearing days between 19 February 2014 and 26 March 2014, in Court 13 of the then Subordinate Courts (now State Courts) of Singapore. The proceedings commenced at 10.00am and concluded at 5.00pm on most days.

34. Under the guidance and direction of the COI, the Investigation Team interviewed and recorded statements from a total of 323 witnesses. The COI reviewed all of the witnesses' statements, and over the course of the proceedings, heard oral evidence from 93 of them. These witnesses included the bus driver and timekeeper of the accident bus, experts on areas such as forensic science and crowd psychology, SPF and SCDF officers, business owners and residents in Little India, foreign worker dormitory operators, government

representatives, NGOs, and foreign workers (one of whom had been a passenger on the accident bus). The COI also viewed useful video footage taken from cameras mounted on the accident bus, LTA cameras mounted at the station exits of Little India MRT station, and footage from cameras and smart-phones taken by members of the public and workers at the scene.

35. On the first day of the public hearing, Senior State Counsel Mr David Khoo presented an opening statement to the COI, broadly outlining the evidence which would be led over the course of the hearing. On the last day of the public hearing, Lead Investigator Mr Adam bin Fashe Huddin presented a summary of the Investigation Team's findings to the COI.

Actions Undertaken by the COI after the Public Hearing

Interviews with Convicted Rioters

36. The COI refrained from interviewing accused rioters while their court cases were pending, so as not to prejudice the outcomes of their cases. On 3 June 2014, the COI interviewed 2 foreign workers who had been convicted and sentenced for rioting. The COI then sought a two-week extension of its deadline to submit the report, to 27 June 2014, so as to be able to consider the rioters' testimonies and other additional evidence received since the conclusion of the public hearing.

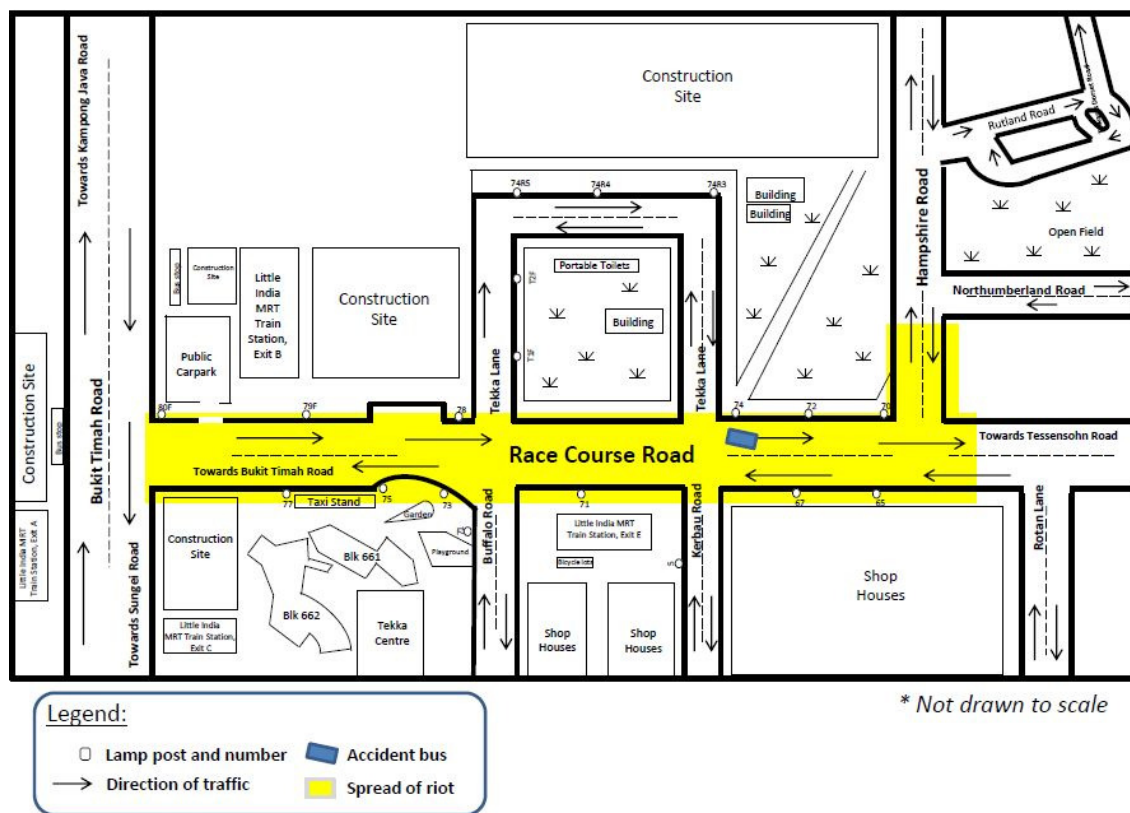
Part II: Findings

The Facts: Riot and Response

The Scene of the Riot

37. First, it is useful to make some notes on the zone in which the riot took place, to contextualise the facts which follow. The riot centred on the scene of the bus accident, which was on Race Course Road very near the shared junction with Tekka Lane and Kerbau Road. In total, the approximate spread of the riot was the length of Race Course Road between the junctions of Bukit Timah Road and Hampshire Road (a distance of approximately 300 metres), mainly on the street itself and on its sidewalks. Rioting also occurred along Hampshire Road, from the junction with Race Course Road approximately up to the junction with Northumberland Road.

Fig. 1: Map of Riot Area



38. Race Course Road is one of the major streets in the Little India district of Singapore. It runs approximately parallel to Serangoon Road, the main thoroughfare and centre of activity in the district.

39. Mainland Singapore is divided into six regions, which each come under the care of a SPF Land Division. The six regions are further divided into 35 areas, each looked after by a Neighbourhood Police Centre (NPC). While the Land Divisions provide command, logistical supplies, specialist services, personnel and administrative functions to the NPCs under each Division's charge, the NPCs bear the responsibilities of frontline policing, such as police patrols, quick response to incidents, and providing counter services.

40. Most of Little India comes under the care of SPF's 'A' Division, and specifically, that of Rochor NPC. A portion of Little India comes under SPF's 'E' Division, and specifically, Kampong Java NPC. Part of Race Course Road is the boundary line between these two jurisdictions. The accident occurred on the north side of Race Course Road, in 'E' Division's jurisdiction, although both 'A' and 'E' Division NPCs and resources were involved in the response to the riot. The Commanding Officers of both Divisions were present at the scene in the second phase of the riot.

Fig. 2: Map of Little India



41. Little India is a historic cultural district in Singapore; a centre of commerce, dining, and recreation for the local ethnic-Indian population, the majority of whom are Tamil. It is a popular place in Singapore to purchase Indian goods, such as spices, gold jewellery, and fabrics, and to sample Indian cuisine. It also attracts foreign tourists in significant numbers. There are also several blocks of Housing Development Board (HDB) flats in addition to private residences in Little India. In this sense, it is also a residential estate.

42. As the Indian and Bangladeshi foreign worker populations in Singapore increased over the past decade, Little India naturally became a locus of activity for them as well. These workers typically head to Little India on Sundays (their most common weekly day off) to meet with friends and relatives, eat, drink, shop, and run errands such as remitting money to their families. Based on anecdotal observations, the workers from Bangladesh tend to congregate in the vicinity of Birch Road and Syed Alwi Road, while workers from Tamil Nadu tend to congregate in the vicinity of Kerbau Road, Cuff Road and Veerasamy Road.

43. On Sundays, in addition to regular public transport, foreign workers have access to private transport from their dormitories to Little India via the Little India Bus Services. This is an initiative led by the Land Transport Authority (LTA) in consultation with the Singapore Contractors Association Limited (SCAL). The buses are provided by two associations: the Singapore School Transport Association (SSTA) and the Singapore School & Private Hire Bus Owners' Association (S7). There are two boarding locations in Little India for the bus service – Tekka Lane and Hampshire Road. Little India is the only place to which this service is available from the dormitories.

44. Little India is also known for its intense concentration of human traffic. Some witnesses, such as the Chairman of the Tekka Residents' Committee and officers from Rochor NPC, estimated that up to 100,000 South Asian workers visited Little India each Sunday, with the numbers being highest on the Sunday after their pay day (usually the 5th of each month). Having such immense numbers concentrated in a small, built-up area meant that jaywalking became commonplace in Little India, with pedestrians spilling off sidewalks into the streets, to the hazard of the vehicular traffic.

45. Such congestion has naturally produced social disamenities which have bothered the residents of Little India for many years. Residents who testified before the COI were particularly concerned about foreign workers congregating at their housing block void decks to eat and drink, and were unhappy that the workers would litter, vomit, urinate, and sleep in their walkways and staircases.

Some testified that a sizeable number of these foreign workers would spend long hours there unwinding under the influence of alcohol.

46. Inter-agency platforms have been set up to tackle these disamenities, the main two being the Little India Task Force (LITF) formed in 2006, and an Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) on Foreign Worker Management formed in 2008. One of the IMC's recommendations was for SPF and the National Environment Agency (NEA) to deploy uniformed Auxiliary Police Officers (APOs) and Protection Officers (POs) to areas where large numbers of foreign workers gathered, to project a uniformed presence, bolster residents' sense of security, and take enforcement actions against disamenities.

47. This was implemented in 2009. Prior to the 8 December 2013 riot, Little India had 8 teams of APOs and POs deployed on weekdays, and 27 teams deployed on weekends, public holiday eves, and public holidays. Each team comprises an APO and 2 POs. APOs are armed with a T-baton and revolver and dressed in uniform, while POs are unarmed and wear a vest, but not a full uniform. On the night of the riot, there were three teams on foreign worker management duty and one team conducting NEA enforcement duties close to the accident site that night, all employed by CISCO.

48. Although the increasing human congestion in Little India resulted in more social disamenities, it is notable that the district's law and order situation has improved steadily over the years. The number of major offences (murder, rape, housebreaking, robbery, rioting, serious hurt, snatch theft, motor vehicle theft, outrage of modesty, and cheating) committed in the district fell by 33% over the past five years, almost double the nationwide decrease of 19%. Prior to 8 December 2013, the area was not known for public order issues either: over the past five years, the district saw fewer than 13 cases each annually of rioting (small-group disorderly behaviour), serious hurt, and affray.

49. What follows is a broad overview of the key events on the night of the riot. It is not a comprehensive list of everything that occurred, nor does it include every anecdote or piece of evidence tendered to the COI. The narrative below includes the information pertinent to the COI's TORs and which forms the basis of the findings and recommendations.

The Traffic Accident

50. It is clear from the evidence that the event which sparked off the riot was the traffic accident which killed Mr Sakthivel Kumaravelu, a 33-year-old construction worker from Tamil Nadu.

51. On 8 December 2013, Mr Kumaravelu was in a queue along Tekka Lane to board a private bus (CB6978T) which was providing transport to the foreign worker dormitories at Jalan Papan. From witness testimony, as Mr Kumaravelu boarded the bus, some workers complained to the bus timekeeper, Ms Wong Gek Woon, that Mr Kumaravelu had jumped the queue and that he was drunk. The bus driver, Mr Lee Kim Huat, also observed Mr Kumaravelu behaving in an intoxicated manner, walking unsteadily. As it was SSTA driver policy not to ferry intoxicated workers, Ms Wong asked one of the other foreign workers in the queue to ask Mr Kumaravelu to disembark. When Mr Kumaravelu did not heed these requests, Ms Wong boarded the bus. She testified that she saw Mr Kumaravelu, who had walked towards the back of the bus, with his trousers around his knees; she told him to pull them up, and disembark. Mr Kumaravelu eventually complied, and alighted from the bus by himself. After three more workers boarded the bus, Mr Lee shut the bus doors and began to drive off. Ms Wong returned her attention to the remaining queue and to the next bus that arrived.

52. Forensic reconstructions of the accident and video footage from cameras on the bus tell us what happened next.²

53. After alighting from the bus, Mr Kumaravelu disappeared from the left camera view. The bus moved off and began to drive slowly down Tekka Lane towards Race Course Road. About half a minute later, Mr Kumaravelu reappeared in the camera view, walking next to the bus and looking in through the front door. He was holding an umbrella and a plastic bag in his left hand, and holding up his trousers with his right. Mr Lee testified that he saw Mr Kumaravelu at this point, and guessed that he wanted to board the bus. Mr Lee waved to him to indicate that the bus was full. After this, Mr Kumaravelu, blocked by other pedestrians, lagged behind the bus, disappearing from Mr Lee's sight and from the camera view. Five seconds later, Mr Kumaravelu reappears in the video, this time running to catch up with the bus.

54. As the bus paused before making its left turn onto Race Course Road, Mr Kumaravelu, still running, stretched his right hand out towards the bus. The forensic reconstruction report by Dr Michael Tay demonstrated that, in these crucial seconds immediately prior to the accident, Mr Kumaravelu was neither visible to Mr Lee through the bus door panels nor his left rear mirror. Mr Lee

² There were five cameras mounted on the bus: one near the driver's seat facing the interior of the bus, one near the driver's seat facing out the front of the bus, one each on the left and right rear mirrors of the bus, and one facing out the back window screen of the bus (activated only by engaging the reverse gear). The cameras automatically began recording when Mr Lee started the bus. However, Mr Lee had not switched on the video monitor connected to the cameras at his dashboard, because the glare from the monitor interfered with his ability to see clearly when driving at night. Mr Lee was therefore not able to see, at the time of his driving, what the cameras recorded.

was looking out to his right for oncoming traffic on Race Course Road, while Mr Kumaravelu was running along the left flank of the bus. And, even when Mr Lee checked his left rear mirror before commencing the turn, he could not see Mr Kumaravelu.

55. As the bus moved to make a left turn onto Race Course Road, video footage showed Mr Kumaravelu placing his outstretched right hand on the moving bus. He lost his balance, and fell face-down onto the street. As the bus was making a sharp turn to the left, his head and torso fell in the path of the moving vehicle's front left wheel, 33cm away, and in an instant were crushed underneath it. Although Mr Lee halted the bus once the impact was felt, the front wheel had by then gone over Mr Kumaravelu's head and torso, the rear left wheel pinning his legs. The accident occurred at 9.21pm.

56. Mr Kumaravelu's death was instantaneous. The autopsy report showed injuries consistent with that of an individual being run over by the tyre(s) of a motor vehicle, and confirmed that death would have been immediate upon the crushing of his skull underneath the front left wheel of the bus. The post-mortem toxicology report showed that Mr Kumaravelu's blood alcohol level was 217 mg of ethanol per 100ml of blood at the time of his death, nearly triple the threshold for the offence of driving while intoxicated (80 mg per 100ml). This state of intoxication likely contributed to Mr Kumaravelu's loss of balance before he fell, along with other factors such as the wet road surface (it had rained) and the fact that he had been carrying items, including a long umbrella, which might have affected his stability.

57. The COI's view is that Mr Kumaravelu was principally the author of his own demise. The level of 217 mg of ethanol per 100 ml of blood, according to scientific literature, indicates heavy drinking leading to ataxia (a loss of control of bodily movement) and poor judgement. At levels exceeding 200 mg, ataxia and poor judgement would be more marked. It was in this state that Mr Kumaravelu attempted to make contact with a moving and turning bus. The COI is not making a moral judgement of Mr Kumaravelu. It was an incident all would sympathise with. However, we must acknowledge that Mr Kumaravelu was primarily responsible for the accident.

Aftermath of the Accident

58. Mr Lee disembarked from the bus. He, along with the rest of the passengers, peered closely under the bus to establish what had happened. As realisation dawned that a Tamil worker had been run over, the crowd around the bus began to thicken. Within minutes, a crowd of workers surrounded the bus. Some were taking photos. Video footage showed some of the workers becoming

emotionally upset. Some appeared sad and stricken; others started to vent their anger by hitting the bus with their hands or shopping bags.

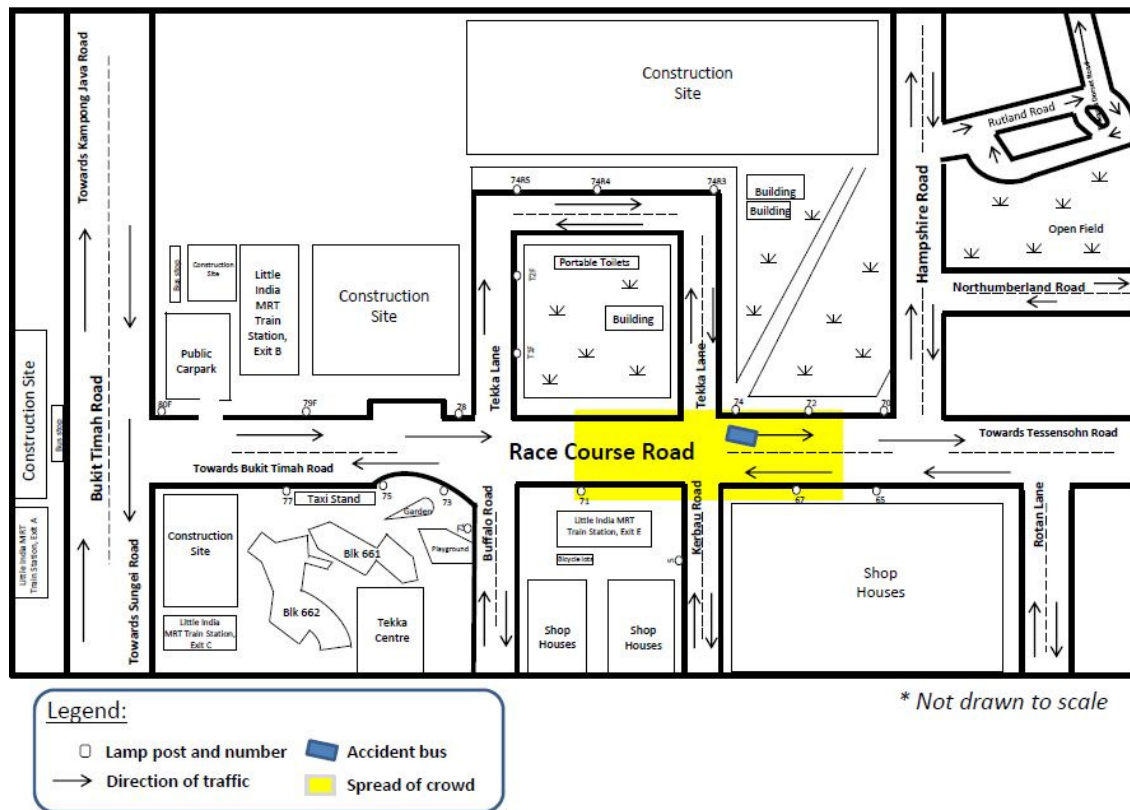
59. Some workers started to grab Mr Lee by his arm and shirt, making threatening gestures at him. When Ms Wong, alerted to the incident by workers who saw the accident happen, arrived at the bus, some in the crowd made threatening gestures towards her as well. One worker in a chequered shirt – who would later be termed the “Good Samaritan” by the media – quickly ushered Mr Lee and Ms Wong onto the bus and blocked the entrance with his body, protecting them from the rest of the crowd. Workers continued to try to push in towards Mr Lee and Ms Wong, making angry, threatening gestures at them. Some attempted to lay blows on Mr Lee and Ms Wong from behind the Good Samaritan. When the crowd refused to back away, Mr Lee and Ms Wong shut the bus door from within.

60. The shutting of the bus door, ensuring the safety of Mr Lee and Ms Wong, seemed to cause the crowd to erupt in fury. Workers punched and kicked the bus, especially against the door. They made violent gestures at Mr Lee and Ms Wong, as if demanding that they disembark. The workers began to pelt the bus with their plastic bags, umbrellas, shoes, bottles, items they found on the street such as metal drain covers and garbage bins, and even the broken-off windscreen wiper from the bus itself. These attacks shattered the bus windscreen, windows and the glass panel of the bus door.

61. From the bus camera facing the interior, Mr Lee and Ms Wong could be seen attempting to take cover. With the bus windows shattered, the workers’ projectiles were flying into the bus from the left and right sides, some of which hit Ms Wong. Eventually, Ms Wong took refuge in the cavity near the driver’s seat at the front of the bus, while Mr Lee hid himself inside a garbage bin which had been flung into the bus. Two workers managed to climb into the bus, through a broken window, one of whom assaulted Ms Wong repeatedly on the head with a stick-like object, demanding to know where the bus driver was. When they were unable to find Mr Lee, the workers left the bus.

Phase One: Extrication and Rescue (9.30pm to 10.15pm)

Fig. 3: First Phase of the Riot



62. The first report which SPF received about the accident was via a 999 call at 9.23pm, just a few minutes after it had occurred. A member of the public informed the SPF Combined Operations Room (COR) that someone had been knocked over by a bus, and that an ambulance was required. SPF officer SSgt Chandru Sivadass received the call at the COR and routed an incident report, classified as a “fatal/serious accident”, to Rochor NPC³, the NPC’s parent ‘A’ Division Operations Room (A DOR), and the Traffic Police Operations Room (TPOR). He also informed the SCDF Operations Centre that an ambulance was needed at the site.

63. At 9.31pm, 8 minutes after receipt of the call, the TPOR dispatched two Traffic Police officers, Sgt Noor Hakim bin Mohamed and Cpl Muhd Tasif bin Sa’at, to the site to manage traffic disruptions and preserve the scene for

³ SSgt Chandru routed the incident to the ‘A’ Division NPC as, not having received information about precisely where on Race Course Road the accident had occurred (and therefore not knowing whether this was better routed to ‘E’ Division or ‘A’ Division), he routed the incident to what he assessed to be the nearest NPC to the accident – Rochor NPC (and, therefore, ‘A’ Division).

accident investigations. As the 999 call had not suggested law and order concerns, A DOR did not dispatch Divisional officers to the scene.

64. As stated earlier, there were four teams of CISCO APOs and POs on duty close to the accident site that night. Two of the teams were respectively led by APO PC Raymond A/L Murugiasu and APO Cpl Osman bin Mahmood. From his team's position at the junction of Northumberland Road and Hampshire Road, PC Raymond saw a crowd of what he estimated to be about a thousand foreign workers surrounding a bus. The team drew nearer to see what had happened. From the chatter of the crowd, PC Raymond – a Tamil-speaker – came to understand that an Indian national had been knocked down by the bus. He and his team walked to the rear of the bus, where they saw Mr Kumaravelu's body pinned under the rear left wheel. PC Raymond radioed nearby CISCO teams for assistance with crowd control, and then called the Kampong Java NPC to inform them of the accident and growing crowd.

65. PC Raymond's call to the Kampong Java NPC was received at 9.27pm by SSgt Yang Yan Ching, who then informed the 'E' Division Operations Room (E DOR) of the incident. The duty Team Leader at Kampong Java NPC, ASP Jonathan Tang, overheard SSgt Yang receiving PC Raymond's call, and volunteered to respond to the incident. At 9.30pm, he left for the site with his partner, SC/Sgt Abdul Aziz bin Abdul Khalid. They were dressed in their uniforms and each armed with a T-baton and revolver. At the same time, the other two APO/PO teams in the area, one led by APO PC Nathan Chandra Sekaran and the other led by APO PC Srisivasangkar A/L Subramaniam, heard PC Raymond's call for back-up and proceeded towards the scene.

66. Meanwhile, two Kampong Java NPC officers, SSSgt Mydeen Hameed and SSgt Mak Chung Kit, were conducting night patrols further down Race Course Road, near a car park at Northumberland Road. Around 9.33pm, Cpl Osman approached them and told them there was a rowdy crowd of foreign workers gathered around a bus down the road near Tekka Lane. SSSgt Mydeen and SSgt Mak drove towards the site, parked near the junction of Race Course Road and Hampshire Road, and proceeded the rest of the way on foot. They estimated that there were about a hundred foreign workers surrounding the bus, some of whom were throwing objects at it.

67. PC Raymond met the two officers and told them that the body of a dead Indian worker was trapped under the wheel of the bus. Given the size and emotional state of the crowd, SSSgt Mydeen radioed E DOR to request back-up. The two officers then walked into the crowd and attempted to calm the workers down and find out more. Some of the workers informed SSSgt Mydeen – a Tamil speaker – that someone was trapped underneath the bus and needed help.

The officers also noticed that there were some people on the bus, and that the crowd's anger appeared to be directed at them.

68. At 9.39pm, 16 minutes after the 999 call, an SCDF Light Fire Attack Vehicle (or 'Red Rhino') arrived at the scene. The SCDF officers who first arrived in the Red Rhino did not immediately realise that there was a body trapped under the bus. They first noticed Ms Wong in the bus, as she was crying for help, and two of the SCDF officers went to try to speak to her. A third, Cpl Mohammad Mahadir bin Mohd Rosechan, was pulled away by a worker who gestured at the rear left wheel of the bus. Cpl Mahadir looked under the bus and realised that a body was pinned there. He assessed that the subject was dead, as he could see that his skull was smashed. Cpl Mahadir alerted fellow officers and they went to retrieve hydraulic equipment from their vehicle. An SCDF Pump Ladder arrived at this point, carrying LTA Tiffany Neo and 5 other SCDF officers. They also unloaded their hydraulic equipment and made their way towards the bus.

69. While this was happening, ASP Tang and SC/Sgt Abdul Aziz arrived at the scene around 9.40pm (17 minutes after the 999 call, and about 2 minutes before the arrival of the Pump Ladder). ASP Tang knew that there were already some SPF officers there because he had heard someone – SSSgt Mydeen – calling for back-up on the radio set, but he did not know who or where the officers were. Seeing the thick crowds not just around the bus and Tekka Lane but also across the open field adjacent to Race Course Road, ASP Tang radioed E DOR to repeat the request which he had heard earlier for back-up. However, with the noise of the crowd, he could not tell if they had heard him, nor if there was a reply.

70. The highest ranking officers among these initial SPF and SCDF responders were ASP Tang and LTA Neo respectively. ASP Tang took charge of the situation. The SCDF officers needed space to set up their hydraulic equipment to jack up the bus and extricate the body. ASP Tang therefore directed the SPF and CISCO officers at the scene to form a human barrier and create space around the bus for the SCDF officers to work. Projectiles were still being thrown at the bus, some of which hit the officers around the bus. Nonetheless, the team managed to provide sufficient room for the SCDF officers to jack the bus up.

71. To ASP Tang, the crowd's hostility seemed to be directed at the bus, not the officers, but he felt that the situation could escalate, as the crowd was growing larger and more emotionally charged. He assessed that the situation required the activation of the SOC. He tried to contact E DOR, but it was too loud for him to use the radio, and he could not get through on the phone line.

Fortunately, at 9.45pm, ASP Tang received a call from SSI Neo Chee Cheng at E DOR, who had also been unable to contact ASP Tang over the radio. ASP Tang apprised SSI Neo of the situation and requested the activation of SOC troops. ASP Tang then turned his attention back to the crowd and the bus. He assessed that his team's first priority was to help SCDF extricate the dead body from underneath the bus. The next priority was to rescue Ms Wong, who was trapped on the bus and whose life could be under threat from the mob (at the time, ASP Tang did not realise that Mr Lee was also on the bus).

72. Meanwhile, with the bus successfully jacked up, SCDF officers underneath it prepared to perform a "snatch-rescue" of the body, which involved pulling it towards the rescuers in one quick motion. As one officer reached in to remove the body, the bus jerked and fell off the hydraulic equipment. The officer managed to pull the body away just in time, before the bus fell back on its wheels. Video footage would later reveal that the bus had jerked as a result of the two workers previously mentioned climbing in through its windows, one of whom had assaulted Ms Wong and searched for Mr Lee in the bus.

73. As the body was being retrieved, LTA Neo had asked ASP Tang if the SCDF officers should remove the body from the scene once it was extricated. Standard protocol for incidents resulting in death was that, after extrication, SCDF should hand the body over to SPF custody. However, in this situation, LTA Neo assessed that the SCDF officers should take charge of moving the body to a secure location, as the SPF officers present were already stretched with crowd control. ASP Tang agreed to have the SCDF officers remove the body from the scene. Once the body was extricated, LTA Neo asked her officers to cover it with two blankets, as it was in a gruesome state. They then laid the body on a stretcher and started to make their way through the crowd towards an ambulance which had arrived earlier (around 9.45pm) and was parked in front of the bus on Race Course Road. It was approximately 9.55pm.

74. At the sight of the covered body, the crowd started shouting more loudly and pushing in more strongly towards the officers. LTA Neo escorted four other SCDF officers who carried the stretcher. Some of the SPF officers who had shielded them around the bus now tried to surround them as protection from the crowd. One of the workers managed to push his way into the group and tried to pull the blanket off the body, but LTA Neo pushed him back and told him to move away. LTA Neo later felt someone hitting her twice in the back, though she did not turn around.

75. The officers eventually made it to the ambulance, where some injured officers were already being treated by a paramedic. The ambulance driver

initially asked that the body not be placed inside the ambulance, as it was against protocol to do so. LTA Neo and her team complied and placed the stretcher on the ground beside the ambulance. As they were still being pelted, the officers formed a semi-circle around the body to protect it. After a few moments, as common sense commanded, LTA Neo decided that the body should be placed in the ambulance, and ordered her officers to do so. She was able to make this decision against protocol as the ambulance was under her charge while she was on shift. They moved the body into the ambulance. The crowd did not prevent them from doing so.

76. After they moved the body into the ambulance, ASP Tang alerted LTA Neo to the presence of Ms Wong in the bus and the need to rescue her. The SCDF and SPF officers proceeded back through the crowd to the bus. Reaching the front door, LTA Neo saw Ms Wong sitting on the steps inside the bus with blood on her head and face. LTA Neo reassured her that they would rescue her, and, as the door was jammed shut, LTA Neo climbed in through the door's broken glass panel. LTA Neo asked Ms Wong if there was anyone else on the bus. Ms Wong told her that the bus driver was hiding in the bus as well. LTA Neo searched the bus for Mr Lee, taking some time to find him as he was still hidden underneath the garbage bin. LTA Neo saw that Mr Lee also had a bloodied head. Projectiles were still being flung at and into the bus. Some members of the crowd were attempting to climb into the bus through the shattered windows. LTA Neo told her officers to crank the door open, and shielded Mr Lee's head as they walked down the bus aisle towards the door.

77. In the meantime, ASP Tang saw that more SPF officers, some equipped with shields and helmets, had arrived. He directed them towards the bus to push the crowd away and to shield the SCDF officers, Mr Lee and Ms Wong when they emerged. ASP Tang then walked through the crowd towards the rear of the bus to see if he could gather more officers for crowd control.

78. Ms Wong and Mr Lee emerged from the bus at approximately 10.08pm. The SCDF officers formed a protective circle around them, and the SPF officers with shields formed another semi-circle around the SCDF officers. In this formation, they slowly started to push their way through the crowd towards the ambulance where they had left the body, which by now had now moved a short distance away from the bus, down Race Course Road towards Hampshire Road. The crowd's anger seemed to turn on them. The projectiles, previously aimed at the bus, were now also thrown at the shield party.

79. As ASP Tang came back around to the front of the bus, he saw that the workers were now throwing stones, bottles, and other projectiles at the shield party. He also saw a SPF patrol car parked a short distance away. He obtained

the key to the car from another SPF officer and drove towards the shield party, intending to quickly escort Mr Lee and Ms Wong away from the scene in the vehicle.

80. Back at the shield party, a projectile hit SCDF officer Cpl Mahadir in the ribs, causing him to fall to the ground. LTA Neo and two other SCDF officers broke off from the group and stayed behind with Cpl Mahadir, who was unable to stand, while the rest of the party continued towards the ambulance. At that point, ASP Tang drove up to their position. As the shield party had already moved forward, ASP Tang used the car to evacuate Cpl Mahadir from the scene. After ensuring that Cpl Mahadir was able to get medical attention from an ambulance near Rotan Lane, ASP Tang walked back towards the accident scene.

81. Meanwhile, the shield party had reached the ambulance where the dead body was. Mr Lee and Ms Wong boarded the ambulance, which then drove further down Race Course Road away from the bus. Near Rotan Lane, Mr Lee and Ms Wong transferred into another ambulance, which then brought them to Tan Tock Seng Hospital to receive treatment for their injuries.

82. LTA Neo rejoined the rest of her team near the bus. She decided that, since they had completed their missions of extricating the body and rescuing the people trapped in the bus, the SCDF officers should leave the scene. At about 10.15pm, they boarded the Pump Ladder, turned the vehicle around, and left the scene in the direction of Bukit Timah Road. As they left, their vehicle continued to be pelted by the crowd. They returned to the Central Fire Station and received treatment from paramedics there for their injuries.

Activating the Special Operations Command and Arrival of Division Commander

83. We now turn our attention to what was happening, at the same time as the events above, to activate the Special Operations Command (SOC) to respond to the riot.

84. As explained earlier, each SPF Land Division has a DOR – a Divisional Operations Room. In addition, SPF Headquarters, located at New Phoenix Park, Irrawaddy Road has a COR – the Combined Operations Room, which coordinates between the DORs. For instance, 999 calls are routed to the COR, which then assigns the call to the relevant DOR based on the location of the incident being reported (or dispatches resources directly if the case is urgent). The DOR then activates Divisional resources to attend to the incident. The COR

also coordinates between Land Division requests for the activation of special resources, such as the SOC.

85. There are three full-time units under the SOC: the Police Tactical Unit (PTU), Special Tactics and Rescue (STAR), and the Police K9 unit. The SOC teams which responded to the riot were primarily from the PTU. The PTU comprises eight troops, known as Police Tactical Troops (PTTs), assigned call signs “KA” to “KH”. Each troop comprises 35 officers: an Officer-in-Charge (OC), a Deputy OC, 4 columns of 6 men each, 4 drivers, and 5 reserve officers. There are two PTTs on duty at any one point in time. On the night of the riot, these were PTT KA and PTT KG.

86. The official protocol to activate the SOC, as of 8 December 2013, required two things: First, the request for SOC activation by the commander on the ground (that night, ASP Tang) must be concurred with by a key officer in the Land Division, i.e. holding the appointment of at least a Commanding Officer of an NPC or above (that night, Head Operations and Training, ‘E’ Division (HOT/E) DSP Julius Lim). Second, approval is required from the Director of Operations, via the COR (that night, Acting Director of Operations DAC Koh Wei Keong). The rationale given for this at the public hearing was that the Director of Operations has oversight of the national situation, and can therefore evaluate where the greatest need for SOC resources is in the event of multiple activation requests.

87. This was the sequence of events to activate the SOC on 8 December 2013:

Time	Event
9.45pm	<p>ASP Tang spoke with the E DOR Duty Officer, SSI Neo, to request the activation of the SOC. This was minutes after the SCDF officers had arrived at the scene. The body had not yet been extricated.</p> <p>ASP Tang reported that there was a crowd of about 100 people gathered around the accident bus at Race Course Road, and that the crowd was throwing bottles and stones at the bus.</p>
9.46pm	<p>SSI Neo called HOT/E DSP Julius Lim for concurrence with ASP Tang’s request, relaying the information about the incident which ASP Tang had given him. DSP Julius agreed that the SOC should be activated.</p> <p>E DOR then relayed the request to the COR for approval by the Director of Operations.</p>

Time	Event
9.51pm	<p>The Duty Radio Officer at the COR, SI Siti Haslinda Osman, called Acting Director of Operations DAC Koh on his mobile phone for approval to activate the SOC. DAC Koh asked SI Siti to inform DSP Julius to call him directly on the phone, so he could find out more about the situation and assess whether the SOC should be activated. The COR conveyed this request to E DOR.</p> <p>As SI Siti was speaking to DAC Koh, COR staff alerted the SOC Operations Room (SOR) to the possibility that SOC troops would be activated. The SOR relayed this to DSP Lim Sin Bin, the Officer-in-Charge of the SOC Police Tactical Troop (PTT) on duty: PTT KA.</p> <p>PTT KA was, at the time, conducting patrols at the City Hall/Boat Quay area. DSP Lim instructed his officers to gather at a rendezvous point at South Bridge Road in preparation for possible activation.</p>
9.53pm	<p>SSI Neo called DSP Julius to inform him, based on information being radioed in by other officers at the scene, that the crowd around the bus had swelled to about 400 persons, and that some SPF officers had been injured by projectiles thrown by the crowd. DSP Julius instructed SSI Neo to cross-dispatch all available SPF patrol cars from the other 'E' Division NPCs to assist immediately.</p>
9.55pm	<p>DSP Julius called Commander 'E' Division DAC Lu Yeow Lim and briefed him on the incident. DAC Lu directed DSP Julius to request that two SOC troops be activated, and informed DSP Julius that he would head to the site from his home.</p> <p>(At approximately this time, the body was extricated from underneath the bus.)</p>
9.57pm	<p>DSP Julius called SSI Neo and requested that a second PTT be sent as well. SSI Neo informed DSP Julius that DAC Koh wished to speak with him directly before approving the activation of the SOC.</p>
10.00pm	<p>PTT KA gathered at the rendezvous point on South Bridge Road.</p>

Time	Event
10.01pm	DSP Julius called DAC Koh and briefed him on the situation, including the recent update that the crowd size had swelled and were demonstrating violent behaviour, and that two SOC troops were needed.
10.03pm	DAC Koh instructed the COR to activate the on-duty PTT to attend to the incident at Race Course Road.
10.04pm	<p>The COR informed the SOR that the PTT activation had been approved. The SOR alerted PTT KA, which then departed from South Bridge Road for Race Course Road.</p> <p>The SOC was thus activated approximately 20 minutes after ASP Tang's request was first made.</p>
10.15pm	<p>Based on updates from the ground on the crowd size and number of officers injured, SI Siti at the COR called DAC Koh to request that the second PTT be activated to attend to the incident. DAC Koh agreed. The COR relayed this activation to the SOR.</p> <p>This was 30 minutes after ASP Tang's first request. PTT KG would depart from the SOC base at Queensway at 10.25pm.</p>

88. After speaking on the phone at 9.55pm, DAC Lu and DSP Julius left their respective homes, unarmed and in plainclothes, and drove to the scene. DAC Lu arrived and parked at Hampshire Road at 10.11pm. As he was the first Divisional Commander to reach the scene, and as the fatal accident had occurred within his Division, DAC Lu assumed command as Incident Manager.

89. DAC Lu proceeded on foot on Hampshire Road from the junction with Northumberland Road to the junction with Race Course Road. As he did so, he saw two SPF officers, Insp Jason Lim and SI Amos Tan, running towards a parked police vehicle at Hampshire Road to retrieve their shields and helmets. DAC Lu approached them and asked how many officers were at the scene. Insp Lim and SI Tan were unable to estimate how many officers there were in total, though they had seen other officers there. As they spoke, rioters' projectiles fell near them, flung from the direction of Race Course Road and the adjacent open field.

90. At the junction of Race Course Road and Hampshire Road, DAC Lu came across two more SPF officers, who were also unable to tell DAC Lu how many officers there were at the scene, nor how many were injured. Projectiles

were being flung at the officers at this junction as well, primarily from two groups of rioters. One group, which DAC Lu assessed to be in the hundreds, was gathered at the junction of Race Course Road and Kerbau Road (the shared junction with Tekka Lane). Another group, which DAC Lu assessed to be of about 50-60 rioters, was standing along Hampshire Road. DAC Lu decided to hold the position there with the four other SPF officers until the arrival of the SOC troops, which he believed were already on the way. They formed a line across a portion of Race Course Road, facing the accident bus.

91. Meanwhile, DSP Julius had arrived at Rutland Road. While running towards the junction of Race Course Road and Hampshire Road, DSP Julius saw a group of about five South Asian workers attacking a vacant police car parked near the junction of Northumberland Road and Hampshire Road. He could also see DAC Lu and a line of SPF officers ahead, at the junction of Hampshire Road and Race Course Road. On his way there, DSP Julius came across a few SPF officers from Bukit Timah NPC and, with them, ran towards the junction to join DAC Lu's line. Along the way, one of the officers – SSgt Griselda Ng – collided with a rioter, who put up a struggle. DSP Julius attempted to restrain the rioter, but as he did so, he suddenly found that the South Asian workers around them, some of whom had previously seemed to be passive bystanders, started picking up objects and pelting him and the other SPF officers. SSgt Ng's shield was struck hard enough that it broke in half. DSP Julius shouted for her and the other officers to pull back to the line of officers at the junction with DAC Lu.

Phase Two: Awaiting the Arrival of the Special Operations Command (10.15pm to 10.45pm)

92. Unbeknown to DAC Lu, at about 10.15pm, PTT KA was near Rex Cinema on Bukit Timah Road, travelling towards the junction with Kampong Java Road. They intended to make a U-turn there and then turn into Race Course Road from Bukit Timah Road. However, there was no direct communication or coordination between PTT KA and the SPF officers already on site. As the radio sets were jammed, nobody could tell PTT KA what would be their fastest route to the scene – which would have been to stop along Bukit Timah Road opposite the Race Course Road junction, and for the troops to disembark and cross over on foot.

93. At about 10.17pm, DAC Lu called the COR to ask where the SOC troops were. He could not get confirmation on their position. Soon after, DSP Julius and the SPF officers with him arrived and joined DAC Lu's line. DAC Lu told DSP Julius to get E DOR to send all available 'E' Division resources to the scene, as the SOC troops had still not arrived. DAC Lu then called the COR

again for an update of the SOC's position, and was told they were still on their way. DAC Lu instructed the COR to tell the SOC troops to enter the site via Hampshire Road, so that they would approach the group of rioters along Hampshire Road from the rear.

94. PTT KA neared the junction of Bukit Timah Road and Race Course Road. At this point, instead of turning into Race Course Road from the junction with Bukit Timah Road, which would have directly brought them to where the destruction was occurring, PTT KA received the instruction from the COR to proceed to where DAC Lu was, by approaching Race Course Road from Hampshire Road. DSP Lim complied, and instructed his convoy to make another U-turn on Bukit Timah Road to head back in the direction they had come from, to access Hampshire Road via Kampong Java Road. This detour cost the troop about 15 minutes, due to heavy traffic and multiple traffic junctions along the way.

95. At 10.27pm, DAC Lu called the Acting Commissioner of Police, Deputy Commissioner (Policy) T Raja Kumar and briefed him on the situation, informing him that he had activated two SOC troops. In the meantime, with limited manpower at the scene, DAC Lu's plan was to hold his position until the SOC arrived. DC Raja concurred with that decision.

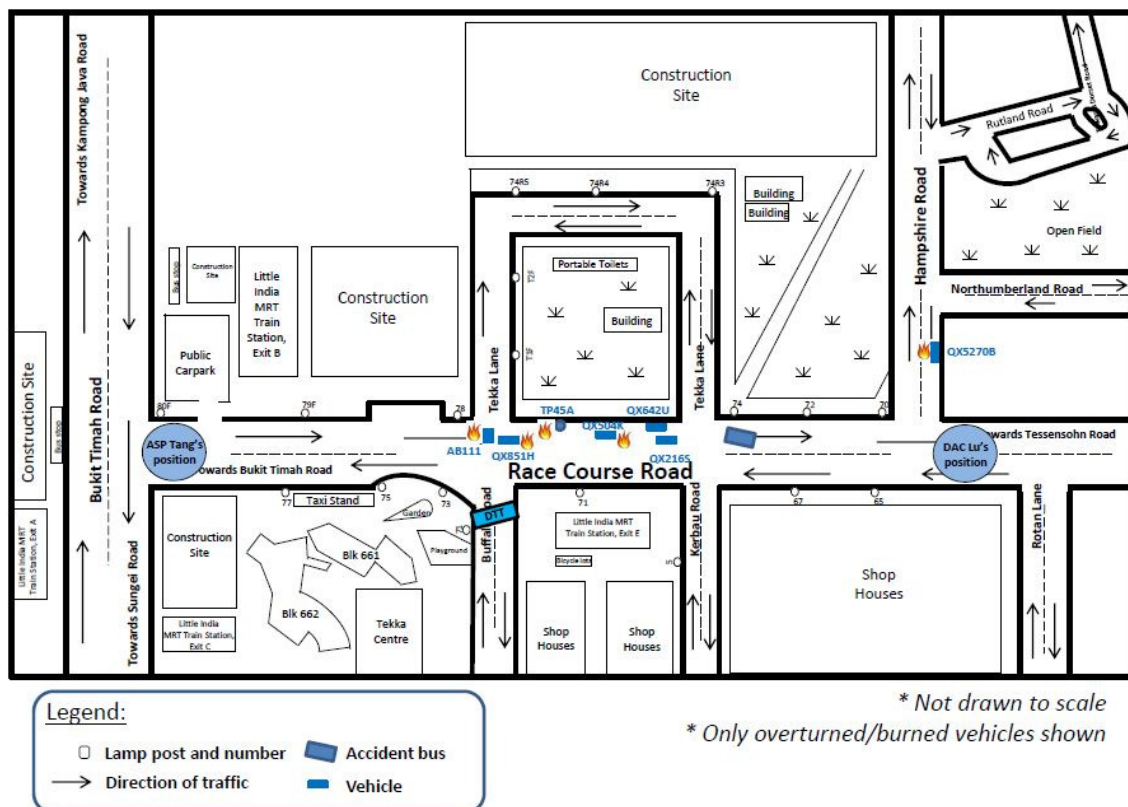
96. At 10.30pm, DAC Lu and the officers at Hampshire Road junction realised that the rioters had overturned and set fire to a vacant police vehicle along Hampshire Road. Two officers started to move forward towards the car, but DAC Lu held them back. DAC Lu decided against engaging the rioters directly, as the officers at the junction – about ten at this time – were still outnumbered by the rioters around them. DAC Lu called the COR again for an update of the SOC troops' location.

97. It was during this second phase of the riot that the rioters became bolder in their attacks; in particular, against the emergency vehicles. While DAC Lu was gathering officers at the junction of Race Course Road and Hampshire Road, ASP Tang was still further down Race Course Road at the accident site. He saw some SPF officers taking cover from projectiles between an SCDF Special Rescue Tender vehicle and an ambulance. Some of these officers had shields and were wearing helmets. ASP Tang assessed that these officers had relatively good cover and continued to search the area for any stranded officers, with the intention of directing them to join the group taking shelter. While searching the area, ASP Tang was hit on the head by a stone thrown by a rioter, but it did not disable him. Not finding any stranded officers, he then joined the group taking cover between the SCDF vehicles.

98. ASP Tang took the advantage of the vehicle cover to attempt to update E DOR on his location and find out what was happening in the rest of the area, but he did not receive responses on his radio set, nor was he able to get through by calling as the lines were engaged. He noticed that the projectiles were getting larger and being flung more frequently; it appeared that the group of officers had been spotted by the rioters. ASP Tang directed the officers, some of whom were injured, to take cover inside the ambulance.

99. Once inside, ASP Tang looked for a way to get the officers away from the scene. The ambulance, however, was locked in by vehicles parked in front and behind it. At this point, around 10.28pm, a group of about 20-30 rioters advanced on one of the police cars parked in front of the ambulance, and flipped it over on its left side. As the rioters cheered while running back to the side of the road, ASP Tang directed the driver to use the gap created by the flipped car to drive off. They drove to the junction of Bukit Timah Road and Race Course Road via Tekka Lane, where they met up with some Traffic Police officers who were directing public traffic away from Race Course Road. ASP Tang gathered the available officers to him – about ten – and formed a line across Race Course Road, with the intention of preventing the riot from spilling over into Bukit Timah Road. ASP Tang took these actions on his own initiative.

Fig. 4: Second Phase of the Riot



100. So, at this point in time, some SPF officers were holding a position across Race Course Road near Hampshire Road (with DAC Lu), and some were holding a position across Race Course Road near Bukit Timah Road (with ASP Tang). In addition, a Division Tactical Team (DTT) from Rochor NPC had responded and was stationed at the junction of Race Course Road and Buffalo Road.⁴ Ideally, having these choke points would have helped to contain the riot and rioters. However, the terrain presented difficulties. There were many routes in and out of the riot area apart from the main thoroughfare, Race Course Road. Rioters could stream in and out via the open field bounded by Tekka Lane, Hampshire Road and Race Course Road, or through small slip roads leading deeper into Little India, such as Buffalo Road and Kerbau Road. Further, as the SPF officers awaited the arrival of the SOC troops, violence continued unabated along Race Course Road between the police lines. Between 10.19pm and 10.41pm, the rioters would flip 6 vehicles and burn 4 of them (one additional vehicle also sustained fire damage from a burning vehicle adjacent to it).

Arrival of the Special Operations Command and Dispersal of Riot

101. At 10.30pm, DSP Lim's vehicle, carrying the officers of column KA2 (the PTT was divided into four columns: KA1, KA2, KA3 and KA4), reached the junction with Kampong Java road. As his vehicle turned into the road, DSP Lim saw that it was heavily congested; the TAVs would get stuck. DSP Lim quickly instructed the other vehicles not to follow suit, and instead make a U-turn to go back down Bukit Timah Road, and enter the site by turning left onto Race Course Road – their original route. It was too late to extricate his own vehicle, however, and so the TAV carrying KA2 proceeded slowly along Kampong Java road, and then onto Hampshire Road. As they reached the junction of Rutland Road and Hampshire Road, DSP Lim saw that their way was now completely obstructed by a fleet of private buses parked along Hampshire Road. It was about 10.35pm. He instructed the officers in his vehicle to debus and proceed to the riot scene on foot. The rioters along Hampshire Road began dispersing at the sight of the KA2 troopers, who were outfitted in their full riot gear and holding riot shields.

⁴ Division Tactical Teams (DTTs) comprise SPF officers who are trained in crowd control, as an intermediary layer between NPC officers and SOC PTTs when dealing with public order situations. However, unlike SOC PTTs, DTT appointments are not full-time: they are held concurrently with the officers' main postings (for instance, as an NPC officer). DTT activation-to-response times are therefore longer – 4 hours. So, activating DTTs to respond to the riot on 8 December 2013 was not a useful option, as it would have taken the teams too long to form up. However, it happened that Rochor NPC had one DTT already on standby that night because of the Trans Pacific Partnership talks which were happening at River Valley Road. That DTT was therefore already formed up, geared and outfitted when they received a call for help at 9.55pm, and were able to quickly proceed to the scene to assist.

102. At 10.40pm, SOC Acting Commander DAC David Scott Arul arrived at the scene in plainclothes. He alighted from his vehicle at Burmah Road and proceeded on foot to Race Course Road, where an SOC Intelligence officer met him and briefed him on the situation. DAC Scott could see a line of SPF officers at the junction of Race Course Road and Hampshire Road being pelted by rioters' projectiles, and headed towards them. Very soon after, at about 10.41pm, the other three columns of PTT KA began to arrive in their TAVs from the Bukit Timah side of Race Course Road, playing pre-recorded messages from the vehicles' public announcement systems ordering the crowds to disperse. These pre-recorded announcements were made in Singapore's four national languages: English, Tamil, Malay, and Mandarin. By this time, many of the rioters who had wreaked havoc in the second phase had disappeared, but those remaining rioters continued to pelt the vehicles with projectiles.

103. At 10.45pm, Commander 'A' Division DAC Daniel Tan arrived in plainclothes, alighting from his vehicle at Rutland Road. He ran towards Race Course Road, where he could see some vehicles burning. DAC Tan met DSP Julius, who brought him to the junction where DAC Lu was. DAC Scott also reached the junction and joined the group. At about 10.48pm, PTT KG pulled up to Hampshire Road in their TAVs. The SOC had finally arrived in force, though it was too late to prevent the overturning and burning of vehicles.

104. The three DACs deliberated for a few minutes on their next course of action. As stated earlier, DAC Lu had assumed command of SPF operations onsite as Incident Manager. DAC Scott, as the highest ranking SOC officer on the scene, assumed the role of Tactical Commander; i.e., the commander of the tactical forces present. DAC Scott advised DAC Lu that, given the size of the mob and the limited SPF resources at the scene, the best tactical option was to disperse the rioters, and arrest only those who resisted or who were overrun as the troops advanced. DAC Lu agreed. DAC Scott then recommended instructing the troops to advance on the rioters down towards Serangoon Road, an area with many small lanes, which would force the rioters to break up into smaller pockets. This plan meant that the dispersal would take place almost entirely within 'A' Division territory; DAC Tan gave his concurrence to proceed. DAC Lu agreed with DAC Scott's recommendation.

105. At about 10.54pm, DAC Lu called DC Raja to inform him of the plan of action, and to request clearance for the use of tear gas. DC Raja approved the use of short-range tear gas, and although in agreement with the plan to prioritise dispersal of the rioters, he instructed DAC Lu to make as many arrests as possible. DAC Lu communicated this to DAC Scott.

106. The rioters were now in two main groups: one clustered around the junction of Race Course Road and Kerbau Road, and another further down Race Course Road near the entrance of the Little India MRT station. The SOC troops held two positions: five columns at the junction of Race Course Road and Hampshire Road, and three columns at the junction of Race Course Road and Bukit Timah Road.

107. DAC Scott instructed DSP Lim to lead the five columns of SOC troops at the junction of Hampshire Road and Race Course Road, and advance in a line across Race Course Road in the direction of Bukit Timah Road. The Divisional officers who were with them formed a secondary line behind the front SOC line. As the troops advanced, the rioters on Race Course Road started to disperse, some running into the five-foot walkways in front of the shop houses and holding up their hands in surrender. As the SOC line continued its advance, the Divisional officers in the secondary line arrested these rioters.

108. With the SOC and DTT troops located at the Bukit Timah Road and Buffalo Road junctions, the rioters were forced to disperse towards Tekka Market, Kerbau Road and Chander Road. The rioters who had not dispersed were divided into two groups: one group formed at the junction of Kerbau Road and Chander Road, and the other gathered at the entrance of the Little India MRT station on Race Course Road between Kerbau Road and Buffalo Road. DAC Scott therefore instructed his force, which now included the 3 SOC columns that had been holding the line at the junction of Bukit Timah Road and Race Course Road, to split into two. The SOC columns turned left onto Kerbau Road and advanced down on the rioters there, and the Divisional officers continued down Race Course Road to disperse the rioters by the station entrance.

109. Even as the troops advanced, some rioters, despite retreating, were still flinging projectiles at them. As the SOC columns moved down Kerbau Road towards Serangoon Road, the rioters were eventually pushed and broken into small groups among the buildings and back lanes, some scattering across Serangoon Road. There were now only small pockets of rioters remaining, some still throwing projectiles at the officers, but others no longer violent. DAC Tan, who was in plainclothes, gathered other 'A' Division plainclothes officers and moved through the back lanes to arrest straggling rioters. The troops continued to sweep up and down the lanes until the last pockets of rioters were successfully dispersed at 11.25pm. The riot was over.

110. With the rioters dispersed, the officers at the scene re-organised to conduct foot patrols along the major and minor roads in the vicinity, doing final sweeps and projecting a uniformed presence. Investigation officers were

deployed to collect evidence for subsequent use. After clean up operations, Race Course Road was re-opened to traffic at 6.45am the next morning.

111. All in all, the riot ended within two hours of the fatal traffic accident. A total of about 240 officers from various SPF units and 56 SCDF officers were deployed to the scene. 37 SPF officers, 12 SCDF officers, 5 CISCO officers, and 8 members of the public were injured in the course of the riot: mostly impact injuries caused by projectiles flung by the rioters. 14 SPF vehicles, 8 SCDF vehicles, 1 private ambulance, and, apart from the accident bus, 6 private vehicles were damaged during the riot.

Factors and Circumstances Leading to the Riot

112. The primary or triggering cause of the riot was the occurrence of the fatal accident. A confluence of other contributory factors fuelled its escalation. This section looks at these other factors and circumstances.

113. The COI's view is that, following the emotional outburst caused by the death of a Tamil worker, three factors contributed to the riot: misperceptions about the accident and response, certain cultural and psychological elements present in the crowd, and the consumption of alcohol by some members of the crowd.

Misunderstandings about the Accident and Response

114. Witnesses who had been at the scene when the riot first broke out consistently testified that the crowd had a very emotional reaction to the fatal accident. Beyond the initial grief or anger at the accident itself, however, it is likely that the crowd's perceptions and misperceptions about what followed ignited further fury that led to an escalation in violence and scale of the riot.

115. First is the issue of what – or who – the crowd perceived to be the cause of the accident. Mr Lee, the bus driver, would in the days following the riot undergo a criminal investigation into whether he was liable for the accident. He was eventually cleared of all charges, as the evidence established that he was not at fault. However, on the night itself, it is natural that the crowd would have blamed Mr Lee for causing the death of Mr Kumaravelu. As bystanders, they could not have known that Mr Kumaravelu had fallen under the bus while running in Mr Lee's blind spot, nor that Mr Kumaravelu had fallen because he had lost balance after placing his hand on the moving bus (rather than a result of the bus knocking him over). The video footage made it clear that the crowd held Mr Lee and Ms Wong responsible for the death of Mr Kumaravelu.

116. When the first responders arrived, the crowd may have expected to see Mr Lee and Ms Wong led away in handcuffs rather than under the cover of the officers' shields. Seeing the officers shield Mr Lee and Ms Wong could have allowed the crowd to think that the authorities intended to protect them, rather than arrest and prosecute them for the accident. This would have aggravated them. Witness testimony supports this: the first responders did not feel that they were the targets of attack until they began to rescue Mr Lee and Ms Wong. Tamil-speaking officers heard some of the workers shouting "*are our lives worthless?*", "*there is no respect for our lives!*" and "*you all only look after the local people!*"

117. Workers interviewed by the COI also spoke of rumours which had been circulating about the accident: for instance, that Mr Kumaravelu had not been immediately killed in the accident, but had been crying for help from underneath the bus. This was untrue: forensic evidence showed that Mr Kumaravelu died immediately as the impact crushed his skull. Another rumour was that Ms Wong, the timekeeper, had pushed Mr Kumaravelu off the bus. This is also untrue: Ms Wong was not on or even near the bus at the time of the accident. There were also rumours of responding officers kicking or disrespecting the body – which we also know to be untrue, from the clear video footage of the incident. However, such rumours circulating in the crowd at the time of the accident would have distressed and provoked the workers. It could have contributed to a sense of injustice that fuelled the anger of the crowd.

Culture and Psychology of the Crowd

118. Dr Majeed Khader, Senior Consultant Psychologist at the Home Team Behavioural Sciences Centre, at the request of the COI Investigation Team, convened a Behavioural Analysis Group comprising experienced psychologists to analyse the psychology of the incident.

119. Following a review of scientific literature on crowd psychology in addition to all of the available evidence, the Group postulated the following view in their report:

“The Behavioural Analysis Group is of the view that the Little India incident was fuelled by a misperception on the part of the foreign workers who may have felt that the situation on the day (loss of a fellow countryman), and the ensuing events that occurred was indicative that the responding authorities were against them. The events of the night had violated their expectations that the responding agencies ought to be fair and to respond to the deceased first rather than to the locals.

...Certain members of the crowd could have had erroneous misperceptions, since the responding forces did in fact extricate the deceased before attending to the locals. In addition, the responding forces did not use unreasonable force, did not fire any shots, and did not injure any workers.”

120. Another factor which the Group identified as contributing to the riot was a desire for “street justice” or “retributive justice” on the part of the rioters:

“Street justice involves punishment meted out by members of the public to people who are perceived as ‘wrong doers’ (even though this may not actually be true)... In many countries and especially in rural and sub-urban settings, there is a ‘retaliatory ethic’ and a sense of the need for retribution for ‘wrongdoing’.

...

Sometimes, victims may feel that street hustles cannot be formally taken to legal authorities... The idea then is to ‘teach a lesson’ to the adversary directly by taking the law into their own hands and attacking the perpetrator(s).”

121. This argument is supported by the testimony which the COI heard from individuals who lived for many years or grew up in India. One of the witnesses, who was born and raised in India, testified at the public hearing of the “law of the underdog” in India:

“I venture to say my personal opinion, having known workers all my life here, as back in India and also knowing the way things – or the mob effect in India, back in India. Back in college I was not directly party to a riot but I was caught in a riot several times while in college or while in public places when I lived in India.

My personal feeling is that the riot on that night, that unfortunate incident that happened that night, was purely a mob reaction to a sudden death that occurred. So there is this huge wave of sympathy towards a fellow brother or a comrade, and whether the other people know him or don’t know him or whether the reason what went wrong, it becomes immaterial and then there is this mob angst that comes up and that’s the reaction that showed up over the night.

I do not think or do not feel that it was premeditated or planned or is a result of any worker inequality or injustice or suffering of that sort.

...

It can happen in any political rally, it can happen in any college gathering. It could happen in a street where - in a street culture in India, a pedestrian crossing the road wrongly, if hit by a scooter the mob would

attack the scooter. If the scooter is in the wrong lane or direction and hit by a car, the mob would attack the car. If the car is hit by a bus, the mob would attack the bus. It goes by this hierarchy. So it is the law of the underdog, what the common man in the street perceives.”

122. Another witness, an Indian citizen now living in Singapore, gave testimony to the COI after the conclusion of the public hearing. In his view, clashing with the police was a sub-culture or counter-culture among some working class men in Tamil Nadu:

“They feel heroism is to disobey the law enforcers. When they see anybody else, police or any authority, in our place, whenever... They directly will feel if you are not obeying the law, you are considered as a hero.”

123. The COI’s view is that some of the workers at the scene that night could have carried elements of such cultural psychology with them, which had a part to play in the riot. It is consistent with the evidence that the rioters had specifically targeted SPF and SCDF vehicles, with comparatively little damage done to private property.

124. The COI accepts the above postulation with the qualification that such men constitute a very small minority Singapore’s foreign worker population. In the course of the Inquiry, the COI interviewed many workers from Tamil Nadu and other parts of South Asia (who had not been involved in the riot), and found them decent and cultured. All of them strongly expressed that they felt that the riot was wrong, inexcusable, and criminal. Even at the scene of the riot on 8 December 2013, there were several workers who manifested pro-social and noble conduct: ‘Good Samaritans’ who attempted either to intervene to protect the targets of the violence – the bus driver, timekeeper, and the SPF and SCDF officers – or to dissuade their fellow countrymen from taking part in the violence, even physically pulling them away. Many workers that night did what they could to help the responding officers; the crowd was not a homogenous mob.

125. The postulation above is also not to say that the South Asian migrant worker community should be unduly viewed as a threat to public order. As explained above, the violent rioters were a small group, and there were many in the crowd who were pro-social and attempted to help the responding officers. In recent years, Singapore has seen public order-related incidents arising from various foreign worker groups, most commonly at dormitories, where workers from different cultures sometimes clash (e.g. Koreans and Thais, more commonly seen in the 1980s). Some might say that such incidents are not

indigenous problems but imported problems, via workers from other cultures who bring in values and habits dissimilar to Singaporeans'. But such actions of a few should not tar the rest of the foreign workers who contribute to Singapore. The foreign workers in Singapore are by and large law-abiding, hardworking, and responsible. The few who commit criminal actions are dealt with, and, where appropriate, repatriated.

126. Riots are a risk and reality in many parts of the world, and Singapore is no exception. The ability to use countering force to overcome violent conduct is a necessary measure. This is why most, if not all, countries have a dedicated riot police in one form or another. Hence, having well-trained and equipped police officers who are well-versed in the psychology and tactics of rioting is an absolute requirement for the safety and security of Singapore. This will be discussed further in the Recommendations section.

Alcohol and Intoxication

127. The role alcohol may have played in the riot was discussed widely in the days and weeks following the riot. Little India residents and shopkeepers, enforcement officers, and even foreign workers testified that alcohol consumption was a common sight in the area on Sundays, especially the Sundays after the workers' pay day. Responding officers on the night of the riot testified that they could smell the alcohol on the rioters they encountered. The fact that empty beer and whiskey bottles were common projectiles used by many of the rioters is a further corroboration of rioter intoxication. Even Mr Kumaravelu was found by autopsy to have been significantly intoxicated at the time of his death.

128. The COI does not think alcohol was a direct cause of the riot, as the accident was. However, it was a major contributory factor, among others, to the nature and escalation of the riot. Many of the foreign workers the COI spoke with who had been present at the scene of the riot admitted to having consumed alcohol that night – although some claimed that they were not intoxicated. At the time of this report's submission, all 4 foreign workers who have pleaded guilty to and been convicted of rioting also admitted to having consumed alcohol that night. Of the four, one told the COI that he was so drunk that he did not remember what he had done, until he was later shown video footage of himself taking part in the riot.

129. Some witnesses at the public hearing who argued against the consideration of alcohol as a factor in the riot claimed that, if alcohol was relevant, then riots would break out in Little India every weekend, and in other common drinking areas, such as Geylang and Boat Quay. This is a flawed

argument because it assumes that, for alcohol to be relevant, it must be able to lead to a riot independent of other factors. The COI disagrees: as long as it may be an aggravating factor in outbreaks of violence, alcohol is relevant.

130. The COI received substantial evidence from psychological and forensic experts on the effects of intoxication on human behaviour. In summary, these were:

- Impaired attention, cognitive processing, and memory. When a person is intoxicated, they are less able to pay attention to and process multiple factors or cues. This “alcohol myopia” reduces one’s attention and focus.
- Aggression, when combined with frustration. When frustrated, a person is more likely to become aggressive if he is intoxicated.
- Overreactions to perceived threats or injustice. Intoxication can lead a person to misjudge social cues and overreact to perceived threats or injustice. Some studies have shown that, in stressful situations, an intoxicated person may be primed to behave in a more confrontational manner when authority figures are present.

131. It is notable that even the foreign workers the COI spoke with (who had not been involved in the riot) strongly condemned the role of alcohol in the riot. Many of them felt that the connection between intoxication and misbehaviour was natural and a matter of common sense.

Further Comments

132. Finally, the COI wishes to make some comments on what, in its estimation, this riot was not about.

133. Riots are complex events. Many social scientists classify them into two categories: instrumental riots and expressive riots.

134. According to the World Book Encyclopedia (1992), “*instrumental riots occur when groups resort to violence because of discontent over specific issues.*” In such riots, the violence results from attempts to change certain policies or to improve certain conditions. Many labour riots in the past fall into this category. Other common examples of instrumental riots include prison riots, election riots, anti-war riots, and student riots. Instrumental rioting often indicates that the organisations being attacked have not listened effectively to or acted upon grievances voiced through ordinary channels.

135. On expressive riots, the World Book Encyclopedia states, “*expressive riots occur when many people in a minority group use violence to express dissatisfaction with their living conditions.*” Such riots commonly feature members of minority ethnic groups who possess grievances such as poor job opportunities, bad housing, inferior schools, or sometimes the use of what they feel to be excessive force by the police. Such riots can be triggered by arrests or other routine police actions that people of the minority groups consider as police provocation or brutality. Large crowds take to the streets as a symbolic gesture of widespread discontent. For some rioters, however, these become opportunities to loot stores for personal gain. For others, the riots are little more than destructive play. In trying to restrain the rioters and promote a return to order, the police sometimes use more force than necessary. Such actions sometimes cause the rioters to become even more violent.⁵

136. In the days following the riot and during the public hearings, some commentators and media establishments published reports which framed the riot in such terms – e.g. that it was about minority issues, or general grievances felt by the foreign worker population.

137. Some such reports, especially from international media, misread the riot here completely. Sun TV, an Indian news network viewed by Tamils globally, telecast in its headline news (in Tamil) on 9 December 2013 a report implying that the riot had resulted as a result of racial conflict:

INDIANS WERE ATTACKED IN SINGAPORE, RESULTING IN VIOLENCE. VEHICLES WERE SET ON FIRE – PANIC ENSUES

In Singapore, an Indian was pushed out of a bus and killed, resulting in a protest that escalated into riots; panic has ensued. Little India is a vicinity where many Tamils from India are residing. It is a large shopping area, and it is common for many Tamils to gather there. Yesterday, when an Indian foreign worker (Tamil) attempted to board a private bus, the female bus driver pushed him off the bus and he died instantly. Fellow Tamils were angered by this incident and attacked the bus, setting it on fire. Following this incident, Singaporeans and Chinese came to the area and attacked the foreign Tamils, resulting in larger scale violence and rioting. Two police vehicles were also set on fire.

138. This report contained several plain inaccuracies; most significantly, that Mr Kumaravelu had been pushed off the bus. Subsequently, Sun TV apologised and aired a corrected version of the report.

⁵ World Book Encyclopedia (1992), Volume 16, page 286.

139. A similar example came from the Financial Times, a globally read newspaper, which published on 9 December 2013 a report titled “*Riot Tarnishes Singapore’s Image as Place of Ethnic Harmony*”, a headline which implied that the riot was related to ethnic issues.

140. The COI finds that these attempts to frame the 8 December 2013 riot as a racial issue are completely unfounded when compared against the facts. Racial or ethnic issues did not arise from any of the evidence tendered or discussions the COI had with a spectrum of witnesses.

141. Local news houses and commentators published reports which focused more on the possibility of the underlying cause of the riot being the allegedly poor employment and living conditions faced by foreign workers in Singapore.

142. The COI took this suggestion seriously, and spent much of the Inquiry, both before and during the public hearings, gathering evidence for or against this. This involved speaking personally to significant numbers of foreign workers, visiting dormitories and construction sites, visiting foreign worker congregation areas, questioning the majority of the witnesses called to the public hearing specifically on this issue, and reviewing research submitted by government agencies, foreign worker employers and employer associations, and labour-oriented NGOs.

143. Nearly every foreign worker who the COI spoke to – including those who were involved in the riot – testified emphatically that they were happy with their jobs and living quarters in Singapore, consistently rating Singapore as “number one” among countries who receive migrant labour. The country’s cleanliness, safety, lawfulness, modernity, and opportunities for self improvement were among the reasons why these workers chose Singapore as their preferred destination for work. Many of the foreign workers the COI spoke to had worked in Singapore for several years, for several companies, by choice.

144. Based on the evidence gathered, the COI does not think that the riot was a result of dissatisfaction among foreign workers with their employment and living conditions in Singapore. As stated earlier, the primary or triggering cause of the riot was an emotional outburst caused by the death of one of their fellow workers, exacerbated by misperceptions, the consumption of alcohol, and the cultural and psychological elements discussed above. The COI’s finding is that labour issues were not involved either proximately or remotely.

145. Given these findings, the COI's view is that the riot on 8 December 2013 was a unique event which falls into neither of the two categories of riots referred to above. The COI says this for the following reasons:

- i. The rioters comprised a very small minority of foreign workers: this was not an incident where large groups of workers took to the streets for a common cause.
- ii. The riot was not premeditated or planned. The rioters primarily comprised the crowd of people in the area prior to the triggering event (the bus accident) and in the vicinity, many of whom took part in the riot intermittently or opportunistically.
- iii. The riot was not related to ethnic or an endemic form of discrimination, nor did it affect Singapore's ethnic harmony subsequently.
- iv. No one else has come forward to justify the acts of the rioters or support what they did, not even fellow foreign workers. Tellingly, nearly all of the foreign workers the COI spoke with (who had not been involved in the riot) condemned the riot in strong terms.
- v. Police brutality was not a factor prior to or during the riot. The police did not charge at the rioters, beat them, or use firearms against them.

146. The COI's view is that the 8 December 2013 riot was, instead, a purely criminal riot with no motivation which some might find legitimate. What the rioters did on the night of 8 December 2013 was clearly illegal and uncalled for, and abused the freedom that Singapore had afforded them as transient workers in the country. Even though we can understand the crowd's emotional distress resulting from the fatal accident, there is no excuse for the assault, property destruction, and arson seen that night.

147. That being said, while the COI is satisfied that foreign workers' employment and living conditions were not the cause of this riot, this is not to say that a riot may never occur on this basis. There is no doubt that there are some foreign workers here who face real difficulties in their employment or living situation, especially those employed by errant firms who might withhold their salaries, not maintain the standards of their accommodation, or refuse workers warranted medical leave. The NGOs who submitted evidence to the COI made this clear, and their work is important to these workers. However, there is no reason to believe that the rioters present at the scene that night – who, investigations showed, worked for different employers and lived in different

quarters across the island – had, as a common cause for rioting, dissatisfaction with their employment and living conditions in Singapore. Anecdotal complaints, however valid, do not amount to evidence of systemic mistreatment.

148. While, based on the COI's investigations, Singapore appears to be a top choice for migrant labour, there is always room to improve the situation. There are errant employers, and there are worker quarters that would not meet government standards. The next section therefore includes some suggestions pertaining to the living and working conditions of foreign workers in Singapore.

Part III: Recommendations

Preliminary Notes

149. To make its recommendations, the COI first has to evaluate how the responding forces dealt with the incident.

150. The COI only has brief comments to make on the SCDF response. We find that SCDF performed its duties well on the night of the riot: the officers demonstrated quick thinking and common sense in departing from certain standard operating procedures to adapt to the changing needs on the ground. They completed their missions – extricating the body and rescuing the bus driver and the timekeeper – well. However, the COI finds that it was ill-advised for the SCDF officers to, thereafter, leave the scene and return to their base. SCDF resources should have remained deployed in the vicinity in case they were needed. More will be said on this in the Recommendations section.

151. Some background information is useful to set the context for the COI's comments on the SPF response. Over the past four decades, as Singapore's security needs evolved, so did SPF's focus and resourcing. The points below draw from the presentation made to the COI by Mr Khoo Boon Hui, former Commissioner of Police and current Senior Deputy Secretary at the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Evolution of Riot Control in Singapore

In the 1950s and 1960s, the police often had to deal with large-scale public order incidents, arising from labour strikes, student protests, and communal conflicts. SPF's riot control origins began in 1952, with the establishment of the first riot squad of the Police Reserve Unit (PRU), following the Maria Hertogh riots in December 1950. In the next two decades, the riot control troops were expanded to deal with industrial disputes and anti-intrusion deployments during '*Konfrontasi*', and to patrol high crime areas. At its peak in 1969, there were 15 PRU troops with 63 regular officers each.

Singapore witnessed a rapid reduction in the number of public order incidents from the mid-1970s onwards. Consequently, SPF gradually shifted focus and resources to other priorities such as crime prevention and community policing. In 1983, the PRU was reduced from 12 to 8 troops and from 63 to 46 officers per troop. This change freed up close to 300 posts for redeployment to support the then newly-introduced Neighbourhood Police Post system. These reductions were made possible by the adoption of new riot control tactics and equipment (such as water

cannons), and the prevailing low incidence of public order situations. SPF training also began to focus more on investigations and other operations.

The SOC was established in 1992. In the 2000s, in view of the growing threat posed by terrorist groups, especially in the wake of the 11 September attacks in 2001, the SOC became a dual-response force for anti-terrorism and public order incidents. Its weapons and equipment were upgraded to deal with armed and anti-terrorism situations. The SOC was regularly deployed on deterrence patrols across the island (including in Little India) and conducted counter-terrorism operations at key events and locations in Singapore.

In 2004, the size of each SOC troop was reduced from 46 to 35 officers, but this was balanced with more intensive training in physical, tactical and firearms proficiency, and by improvements in gearing, riot fighting equipment (e.g. tactical support vehicles), and leveraging on technology as a force multiplier.

152. The COI's view is that, throughout this evolution, SPF has achieved good outcomes in both crime-fighting and counter-terrorism. SPF's progressive shift of resources from riot control to community policing and investigations was a positive development: in essence, SPF became less militarised and more civilianised; in other words, more oriented towards civil functions and engaging the community.

153. However, given the riot, SPF will have to further calibrate the distribution of its resources. SPF must re-assess the likelihood of having to deal with large-scale public order incidents and strengthen the ability of its forces to do so.

154. In the last four decades, Singaporeans became a more cultured, peace-loving, and law-abiding population, which reduced the need for a large SOC. In Singapore, no one expected that an accident could produce such a riot, and so we were not prepared for it. Now that it has happened, the important thing is to ensure that it does not happen again. SPF and other authorities must reassess the situation, taking into account foreign worker congregation areas and other hotspots, and reshape their capabilities and competencies to this end.

155. Having summarised the evolution in SPF's riot control capabilities over the years, we now append some notes more specifically on SPF's riot control doctrine. The points below are, again, drawn from former CP Khoo's presentation to the COI.

SPF Riot Control Doctrine and Measures

Mission and Objectives

The overall mission in response to any public order incident is “*to protect and restore public order*”. The aim is to de-escalate and restore the situation to normalcy as soon as possible. In doing so, the Incident Manager, typically the ground commander, is guided by the following considerations:

- i. SPF responses must prevent potential public order situations from escalating.
- ii. Preservation of life and property is paramount. Swift and firm action must be taken to restore law and order when life and property are threatened.
- iii. SPF will not condone riotous and disorderly behaviour.
- iv. Actions taken by SPF must place it on moral high ground and must be publicly defensible. This requires all police action to be strictly in accordance with the law, and able to stand up to public and media scrutiny.
- v. SPF responses must be proportional and commensurate with the assessed public order threat and situation, and must not come across as being heavy-handed.

Appreciation of Situation

The Incident Manager decides on appropriate responses based on his assessment of the situation and the nature and extent of the public order threat. This includes the characteristics, intent, and sentiment of the crowd, such as whether the participants are passive or aggressive or display any criminal intent. The Incident Manager would also seek to identify the presence of “ringleaders or organisers” who may be inciting the crowd. The size of the crowd, number of active participants within, and the resources available on hand are also important factors in determining the type of tactics and responses.

Responses and Tactics

The Incident Manager has a suite of calibrated responses and tactics to choose from that is commensurate with the level of threat. These options range from defensive postures to more robust responses. For example, the Incident Manager may choose to disperse the crowd, box-in and arrest the most active elements of the crowd, or target the ringleader(s) for arrest. Where necessary, baton charge tactics may also be used. Other force options include the use of water cannons, chemical irritant agents and impact rounds, and in extreme situations, lethal force.

Given the potential volatility of public order incidents, the available force options should be calibrated according to the level of assessed public order threat. The Incident Manager needs to consider the intent and implications of the various tactics applied. In circumstances where there is imminent threat to life, all SPF officers are empowered to act to save lives. Such an option extends to the use of lethal firearms.⁶ The selection of tactics need not be linear: i.e. it is not a requirement to use lower-tier tactics before using higher-tier ones, as ground situations can be very dynamic.

Any decision made to use force must be backed by the knowledge and confidence of being able to “dominate” the situation. This requires sufficient numbers of officers with the appropriate equipment and training to cope with the crowd and allow for controlled delivery in the application of force. If use of force is attempted with insufficient numbers of officers, there is a high risk that officers could be overwhelmed during the confrontation. This leads inadvertently to a spiral of force escalation beyond the original intent as officers attempt to extricate themselves and, in so doing, resort to the use of lethal force. Similarly, riot control tactics are also dependent on the number of officers available vis-à-vis the crowd

⁶ The SPF Use of Force Doctrine for general policing states that there are four levels of force options available to SPF officers:

- i. Firearm – the highest level of force, used to incapacitate a suspect in situations where there is imminent threat of death or grievous hurt to the officers or innocent parties.
- ii. Stun Device / Baton – second highest level of force, used in violent situations where there is no imminent threat of death or grievous hurt.
- iii. Unarmed Tactics – used to deal with violent situations where their weapons are not available or necessary, such as when the subject only resists passively; allows officers to subdue and contain a situation quickly without further escalation.
- iv. Verbal Command – lowest level of force, used to prevent a potentially violent situation from escalating or to gain a psychological advantage over the target and take control of the situation.

size, as certain tactics (such as box-in tactics) require the response force to be significantly larger than the crowd.

156. The COI accepts the substance of the above statements. With this information as context, the COI discusses its views on the SPF response below.

Comments on the SPF Response

157. Overall, SPF responded to the riot relatively swiftly and efficiently.

158. As stated earlier, the COI finds that there were two distinct phases to the riot before the SOC arrived. The first phase was from the time of the accident until about 10.15pm. It was clear that the responding officers, led by ASP Tang and LTA Neo, did a commendable job of handling the situation.

159. In this phase, the police also acted wisely in not prioritising arresting or taking action against the rioters. At this stage, the rioters' anger and actions were confined to targeting the bus, the bus driver and the timekeeper. The cause of their actions was the fatal accident and the presence of the dead body. The responding officers were not yet being targeted. Any direct action taken by the police against the rioters in this phase would have taken an ugly turn. There were too many rioters and too few SPF officers there.

160. In the second phase of the riot (that is, after the extrication of the body and evacuation of the timekeeper and bus driver), video footage of the scene indicated a lull, with fewer rioters and onlookers than before. The SPF officers at the scene were not visible in the videos at this time. SPF and SCDF vehicles were left unprotected, essentially sitting ducks. Then, a small group of rioters near the MRT station entrance began pelting the vehicles with projectiles. This group began to grow. These rioters broke concrete slabs from the sidewalks into pieces and began to hurl them towards the vehicles. Others joined in the pelting. Eventually, some went forward to overturn the vehicles. Then they began to set fire to them. None of these rioters were stopped or arrested until the full SOC forces arrived after 10.45pm.

161. The second phase was critical. The SPF officers decided to hold their positions. This allowed the rioters to pelt them with projectiles, and overturn and set fire to emergency vehicles. The COI believes that the number of active rioters in the second phase was not large, but they had free rein to do whatever they wanted.

162. Riots are dynamic situations which call for a dynamic response. The COI, after reading all the material before it and hearing the oral evidence of the

witnesses at the public hearing, finds that there were several lapses in the actions by the police during the second phase of the riot.

Communications Failure Leading to Inability to Marshall Scattered Forces and Exercise Command

163. The SPF officers at the scene of the riot faced severe communications problems. They could not clearly speak into or listen to their radio sets above the noise of the crowd, and with too many messages being sent over the same frequencies, their radio sets were jammed. This made it near impossible for the officers, each arriving at different locations and spread across a large, crowded area, to quickly establish each other's positions and form up.

164. This made it very difficult to establish proper command and control of the incident. Without the ability to communicate, there was no co-ordination of the available men at the scene between 10.15 and 10.45pm.

165. It was reported in Straits Times on 10 Dec 2013 that “police reinforcements [began] arriving in waves”, with a 9 Dec 2013 report saying “about 300 police officers” responded to the scene. Investigations later showed that at 10.15pm there were about 136 officers, comprising 50 Divisional officers, 24 Traffic Police officers, and 62 CISCO officers, in the area. By 10.25pm, there were 159 officers, comprising 70 Divisional officers, 27 Traffic Police officers, and 62 CISCO officers.⁷ So, there was actually a sizeable number of officers present. However, as they were scattered in small pockets across the riot area and unaware of each other's positions, they could not form up into a critical force. Furthermore, as officers and commanders arrived at different locations at different points in time, the identity of the Incident Manager changed (first ASP Tang, and later DAC Lu). For this reason, many of the officers at the riot area that night did not know who the commander on the ground was.

166. In light of the above challenges, it would have helped to set up a SPF command post and reporting station to marshal and mobilise the available resources while waiting for the SOC to arrive. A single reporting station would have helped to improve communications, the sharing of information, and establish clear command.

167. The lack of communications also added to the delay in the arrival of the SOC. DAC Lu was unaware of the extent of rioting taking place near the accident site, approximately 100 metres away from him. DAC Lu's instruction

⁷ These numbers includes both plainclothes and uniformed officers. The numbers also include injured officers.

for the SOC to meet at Hampshire Road resulted in the SOC being caught in more traffic and arriving even later – even though the troops were in reality more needed near the Bukit Timah Road side of Race Course Road.

168. That said, when communications fail, commanders on the ground must resort to other means of obtaining critical information. The COI believes DAC Lu should have made more effort to establish the resources available and find out more about the situation, either by instructing his officers to move around, or doing so himself.

Decision Taken to Hold Position and Not to Arrest Rioters

169. The SPF officers' decision to await the arrival of the SOC before taking action was based on the assumption that the SOC would arrive imminently. The officers did not realise that, due to a delay in deployment and traffic congestion, the first SOC forces would take a total of about 50 minutes to arrive from the time the request for activation was made. Had the SOC arrived earlier, the rioters would not have had as much time to cause mayhem.

170. Holding positions at the two ends of the riot area was inadequate to prevent the free inflow and outflow of rioters, as described earlier. The act of holding a position may also have been perceived by the rioters as inaction, which could have encouraged and emboldened them to carry out more egregious acts.

171. If the SPF officers had set up a command post, they could have used that as a base to move in to arrest as many of the rioters as possible – which was only done later, after the SOC arrived. In the interim, however, video footage showing the riotous crowd cheering at every successful flipping and ignition of an emergency vehicle tells us that the rioters were likely to have been emboldened each time they caused damage to property and faced no immediate consequence. Also, many SPF officers at the scene were in plainclothes. This was not desirable.

172. It was argued by some SPF witnesses that the above measures were not possible because the SPF officers at the scene were outnumbered during this time. The COI, based on its viewing of videos of the riot, especially those of the LTA cameras from the MRT station entrances, is of the view that there were opportunities to intervene and take decisive action. In particular, the COI heard the testimony of two responding officers – Traffic Police officer Sgt Fadli Shaifuddin Bin Mohamed Sani, and APO PC Srisivangkar A/L Subramaniam – who attempted to either charge at groups of rioters or detain them. Neither of these officers was overwhelmed. When DSP Lim was leading a single PTT

column down Hampshire Road on foot – comprising just 6 officers – testimony indicated that rioters there “*melted away*” at the sight of them. Those officers were not overwhelmed either.

173. DAC Lu testified that, at the time when he called DC Raja, he was being pelted by about 200 rioters. DAC Lu also said that there were 50-60 rioters on his right on Hampshire Road and “hundreds” on his left, including those who were overturning the vehicles and setting them on fire. In his testimony at the public hearing, DAC Lu discussed the 2011 London riots during the COI hearings, and argued that the police could do nothing if they were outnumbered. The COI is of the view that there were sufficient officers to take action had they been marshalled and directed to do so. The rioters were destroying property and pelting the officers with objects, but the COI does not agree that it was a life-threatening situation, or that the officers would have been in severe danger had they moved in to stop and arrest the rioters at this time.

174. Lastly, DAC Lu testified that he felt his best course of action was to hold his position until the arrival of SOC. The COI believes that this should have been re-evaluated when the SOC was late in arriving. As the situation on the ground was changing, the response should have been adjusted accordingly.

Prioritising Dispersal over Arrest

175. Once the SOC arrived, it is clear that the riot was dispersed within a very short period. Properly geared, in formation, and with public announcement systems playing warnings, the dispersal by SOC was swift and effective. By then, however, the number of rioters was already observed to be dwindling.

176. The SOC and SPF forces in that last stage of the riot made the tactical decision to focus primarily on dispersing the rioters, and secondarily on arresting as many as they could. This distinction was important: it would have been difficult for them to focus equally on both missions. The basis of this decision was the SOC Commander’s assessment that he did not have enough men to carry out effective arrests while also retaining sufficient numbers to create an intimidating enough presence to disperse the crowd.

177. Where protests result in disturbance of public peace, it may not be feasible to effect arrests especially where the participants are large in numbers. But when violence is threatened or is taking place, and in particular, the number of rioters is not large, making arrests is imperative. Arrests must also be done as early as possible. The COI is of the view that DC Raja’s advice to effect arrest was appropriate. If the police had done more, including arresting the rioters early, they could have prevented the situation from worsening.

178. All in all, 25 people were arrested at the scene that night, with more arrested subsequently. Eventually, 25 people were charged, 57 persons repatriated, and over 200 warned.⁸

Concluding Comments

179. The COI is of the view that the training and equipping of SPF officers to deal with public order incidents have to be improved. There is also much room for improvement in communications, as it was plain that the communications failure materially affected the ability of the commanders on the ground to act. SPF could have managed the situation much better during the second phase of the riot, even with limited numbers, if they had better communications. Rectifying these problems has to be a priority. The COI makes recommendations to this effect in the section that follows.

180. However, the above being said, the COI's view is that the lapses in the second phase of the riot were an aberration from the norm. They do not reflect a serious and systemic defect in the police force as a whole. Rather, the actions reflected the decisions of the ground commander who could have taken more positive action instead of holding a position until the SOC arrived. In addition, none of the SPF officers on the ground that night had encountered such a major riot before. Besides the SOC, most were not trained or equipped to deal with the behaviour of the rioters.

181. In the view of the COI, SPF is on the whole an efficient and effective institution, and is one of the finest police forces in the world. The key is to learn from this incident, so that mistakes are not repeated and future responses are improved.

⁸ The first group of 25 persons included instigators and those actively involved in egregious acts of violence. The second group comprised 57 persons who had knowingly joined or continued to participate in the riot, despite being ordered to disperse by the police. The third group comprised 213 persons whose involvement was assessed to be passive and incidental.

Strengthening the Home Team

Improving SPF's Communications, Command and Control Capabilities

Recommendation

To improve SPF's communications, command and control capabilities, to help officers dealing with public order incidents build a better picture of the ground situation, especially in rapidly changing scenarios.

Discussion

182. One learning point from the riot is that SPF's communications, command and control capabilities – in terms of having an overall situational picture, organising resource deployment, and having an effective communications system – should be reviewed and enhanced.

183. The SPF officers on the ground in the second phase of the riot were scattered and unable to locate one another, and the commanders were not able to marshal their officers together into a significant force. The lack of up-to-date information and communication rendered the command and control of the incident extremely difficult, and did not allow officers to take more decisive actions against the rioters before the arrival of the SOC.

184. To improve overall command and control, the SPF COR and DORs, which are responsible for painting the overall operational picture for senior leadership, need to have better technological capabilities to see what is happening on the ground. This should include being able to leverage on all available video feeds, whether from closed-circuit cameras on the streets, SPF in-vehicle cameras, or body-worn cameras on officers which SPF is now testing. Social media monitoring should also be a part of the centres' capabilities. Where there is an absence of official footage, pictures and videos captured and uploaded by people in the area can be an additional data source.

185. SPF should also look into upgrading its communications system for officers on the ground. For instance, there may be a need to create a priority protocol for major operations, where the Incident Manager's frequency is prioritised or can effect a "talk-through" so that orders he issues can be heard by all officers and above other messages. The radio sets also need to be upgraded such that officers are able to clearly hear and be heard on their sets even in very noisy situations, such as the night of the riot.

186. Communications between the ground commander and SOC resources should also be made more direct. During the incident, communications between Incident Manager DAC Lu and the SOC (via DSP Lim), such as DAC Lu's request that the SOC arrive via Hampshire Road, had to be sent through the COR, which resulted in back-and-forth calling and crucial time lags. If DAC Lu had been able to speak directly with DSP Lim to determine the location of the PTT KA, the SOC could have arrived more quickly at the incident site, without having to make a U-turn and attempt to enter via Hampshire Road.

Training & Equipping Frontline Officers

Recommendation

To appropriately train and equip frontline officers from the Land Divisions and NPCs to effectively defuse and contain large-scale public order incidents.

Discussion

187. Apart from the SOC, most of the officers at the scene were not trained, prepared, or equipped to deal with large-scale rioting.

188. In light of the lessons from the second phase of the riot, SPF should review the type of training and equipment requirements for frontline officers to enable them to better deal with rapidly escalating public order situations. In particular, these officers need to be able to defuse such situations and prevent them from spreading. Frontline officers would be, by virtue of their posting, well placed to nip such situations in the bud as they would be the most familiar with the ground sentiment and terrain.

189. The COI says this because frontline officers may not always be able to afford to wait for the SOC to arrive when public order incidents break out:

- In Singapore, buildings are in close proximity and can be easy targets for a raging mob. This may allow a violent situation to rapidly escalate if ground officers are not able to adequately handle the situation without the SOC or prior to the SOC's arrival.
- Poor traffic conditions and large gatherings of curious onlookers can impede or delay the arrival of the SOC.
- A riot in one location can spread to other localities of Singapore. With modern communication such as mobile phones, news of a riot can spread

rapidly, and violence may spread to other locations including work sites and dormitories. There may not be sufficient SOC troops to attend to multiple incidents spread over multiple locations.

190. Thus, the COI recommends that frontline officers be provided with training, protective gear, and other necessary equipment to deal with unexpected public order incidents. Frontline officers should be trained to be prepared to use their batons as a method of riot prevention and control – as is stated in the SPF riot control doctrine earlier summarised. This is an essential component of riot control for police forces all over the world. In addition, frontline and Divisional officers alike should be instructed to, wherever possible, don their uniforms before attending to public order incidents (unless there are specific tactical reasons for having some officers in plainclothes). In a riot, the psychological effect on rioters of seeing officers in full or official gear should not be underestimated.

191. Protective gear should also be extended to officers in non-combat roles who may be called to attend to public order incidents. During the public hearings, Commander, First Division SCDF LTC Daniel Seet testified that SCDF was looking into improving the protective gear for paramedics, in recognition of the fact that they may be called into potentially dangerous situations. The COI supports this suggestion.

192. On the question of equipment, the COI particularly recommends that SPF issue suitable mass communication devices to frontline officers. One of the major difficulties the first responders faced when they arrived at the scene was communicating with the crowd: though they tried to talk to members of the crowd closest to them, this was insufficient to convey key messages to the larger crowd or dispel misperceptions they might have held. Later, in the second phase of the riot, SPF officers were similarly unable to mass-communicate warnings to disperse until the SOC arrived with their TAV-mounted public announcement systems.

Increasing Manpower Resources

Recommendation

To increase SPF's manpower resources, including the SOC, so that they can better manage mass congregation areas such as Little India, and be ready to deal with large-scale public order incidents. However, quality rather than quantity should be the major consideration in augmenting the force.

Discussion

193. Little India presents special challenges, in view of the massive congregations of Indian migrant workers who gather there on weekends. On 8 December 2013, following the accident which killed Mr Kumaravelu, the sheer number of foreign workers gathered around the scene of the accident overwhelmed the first responders. This was despite the fact that Little India, prior to the accident and the subsequent riot that erupted, was already better resourced than the average equivalent sector. Unlike other sectors under Rochor NPC, which had 1 SPF patrol car deployed, Little India had 3 patrol cars.

194. Witnesses from the public testified that they felt the uniformed presence in Little India over weekends was insufficient, despite the deployment of several teams of APOs and POs to address social disamenities. At the same time, SPF witnesses spoke of the difficulties of deploying even more resources to Little India vis-à-vis other congregation areas, as they had to take into account security demands across the island. The COI was also told how SOC troops had been reduced in size and number over the years, in tandem with Singapore's changing security concerns, and of the need to use valuable manpower in other areas.

195. In the immediate aftermath of the riot, SPF enhanced its presence in Little India by deploying 84 SPF officers and 1 SOC troop to the area. This deployment has now been scaled down. At the time of the submission of this report, 20-30 SPF officers and 1 SOC troop are deployed in Little India over weekends, the eves of public holidays, and public holidays. This is on top of the 81 APOs and POs engaged to supplement the uniformed presence on the ground and mitigate social disamenities over weekends.

196. In the longer term, SPF needs to review its manpower deployment in Little India on weekends, and develop contingency plans for rapid response to public order incidents. However, the COI acknowledges that this is difficult to do with SPF's current manpower.

197. SPF has grown from about 9,000 officers to about 10,300 officers over the past ten years (including both uniformed and civilian officers), an increase of about 15%. Despite that, Singapore's ratio of one regular SPF officer for every 614 residents is still low, in comparison to Hong Kong, Tokyo, New York, and London. In the wake of this incident, SPF may need to deploy more resources to Little India and other mass congregation areas, and to increase the SOC's ability to respond to large-scale public order incidents effectively and swiftly. A well-trained and adequately resourced police force will help Singapore maintain the safety and stability which we all enjoy today.

198. The COI therefore supports SPF's request for more manpower, but with the caveat that quality rather than quantity should be the major consideration in augmenting the force.

Building on Whole-of-Home Team Coordination

Recommendation

That SPF and SCDF continue to build on their ability to respond in a concerted and co-ordinated manner to public order situations, such as that seen on 8 December 2013.

Discussion

199. One positive outcome of the riot was that it demonstrated strong teamwork and collaboration between the SPF and SCDF units in the first phase of extrication and rescue. It was only by working seamlessly together as a single team that, despite the rowdy mob encircling them, the first responders were able to pull off an effective extrication of the body and rescue of the bus driver and timekeeper. There was also effective command: LTA Neo directed her SCDF officers and ASP Tang his SPF officers, but both recognised that ASP Tang was overall in charge of the operation, and they worked together seamlessly.

200. The COI suggests that SPF and SCDF build on this and further strengthen their cooperation on the ground, including training together for public order incidents, and reviewing the joint infrastructure necessary to strengthen a collaborative response. LTC Seet testified that SCDF and SPF units meet and collaborate on a regular basis in joint operations and exercises, which has helped to build rapport and camaraderie between them. The fruit of such exercises came to bear on the night of the riot. This is a useful practice, and emphasis should continue to be placed on such regular collaboration.

201. The COI makes one note of criticism, however. Once the retrieval and rescue operations were accomplished, the SCDF vehicles and officers returned to their base. Often, riots are accompanied by arson of public and private property, and the SCDF vehicles, in particular the fire engines, should have remained in the vicinity to be ready to render assistance if required.

202. In view of the fact that public order incidents naturally give rise to injury and other emergency situations which require SCDF expertise, it may be useful for SPF and SCDF to develop joint standard procedures for managing unanticipated public order incidents. Once such an incident is known to be

taking place, SCDF should station resources near to the scene as quickly as possible, so as to be able to respond to fire or rescue needs that arise. While the officers on the ground on 8 December 2013 rose to the tasks set before them in the first phase of the riot effectively, having certain standard protocols and understandings in place can improve the efficiency of joint responses even further.

203. The COI also recommends that SPF study the dynamics of rioting in other jurisdictions in designing its protocols for response.

Cutting Layers of Approval for Resource Activation

Recommendation

That SPF look into generally cutting layers of approval or time needed to activate essential resources to respond to public order incidents and other emergencies.

Discussion

204. Having multiple layers of approval and concurrence for the activation of the SOC was one factor which slowed their arrival. The COI was told that, since the riot, SPF has looked into the issue of SOC activation, and has devolved power to authorise it from Director of Operations to the Division Commander. This is a positive step forward and the COI welcomes it.

205. More generally, the COI recommends that SPF also look into its activation protocols for other essential resources or tactics which may need to be deployed to respond to public order incidents and other emergencies. SPF should use the lesson of the riot to proactively seek out other areas where unnecessary red tape can be cut, to be able to meet Singapore's security needs more swiftly in times of need.

206. Instructions on the deployment of SOC and other mobile resources should also take into account the fastest route possible for them to reach the scene, balanced against the need to have them arrive at a particular location. It should also be regular protocol that Traffic Police should be simultaneously activated specifically to direct traffic at the scene so as to facilitate the rapid arrival of such resources.

Measures to Manage Congregation Areas

Enhancing the Safety of Congregation Areas

Recommendation

To install additional lighting, safety and surveillance devices in areas which see large congregations of foreign workers, in addition to making better basic facilities available to those who congregate there.

Discussion

207. Little India holds a unique attraction for South Asian workers, who go there on Sundays to meet relatives and friends from their hometowns who are working in other parts of Singapore. They use Little India, with its proliferation of Indian shops and eateries, as a central meeting point. Little India is therefore difficult if not impossible to replicate, and the COI does not think it possible (nor desirable) to eliminate the crowds there altogether.

208. Little India is also not the only congregation location for foreign workers. The COI visited other areas such as Golden Mile Complex, Peninsula Plaza, and Geylang, where other groups of foreign workers typically congregate. It would not be realistic to expect that workers from common cultures or countries would not find common spaces to meet, socialise, and run errands. What the COI therefore recommends is to enhance the security of such spaces, if the crowds there cannot be avoided or greatly reduced.

209. The COI was briefed on SPF's post-riot measures to enhance the safety and security of Little India, which the COI supports. These include the installation of additional cameras and lighting, which will on a daily basis act as deterrents against crime, and in the event of any other public order incident, give SPF a better situational picture.

210. Apart from security infrastructure, the COI is of the view that the general infrastructure available to the public at congregation areas should also be improved. These include simple amenities, such as toilets, rubbish bins, and sheltered walkways.

211. The above measures, both in terms of security and basic infrastructure, should be extended to other congregation areas as well, in particular Geylang, whose terrain and challenges the COI found most similar to that of Little India among the congregation areas it looked at.

Measures to Reduce Congestion and Crowding

Recommendation

To make more services and amenities available to foreign workers outside of congregation areas, and to work with local community stakeholders on measures to reduce congestion at congregation areas.

Discussion

212. As stated above, Little India and other foreign worker congregation areas are social meeting points which the COI sees as desirable to maintain. However, the COI's view is that it may be possible to reduce the size and density of the crowds in these areas by having more locations where the services and amenities workers need to access are available. The concentration of services available in Little India and other congregation areas makes errand-running convenient, and some workers who the COI interviewed testified that goods (especially groceries) were generally cheaper in Little India than those which they could purchase at shops or mini-markets near their dormitories.

213. The COI recommends that government agencies and employers of foreign workers work with dormitory operators to bring in vendors that provide common services required by foreign workers, such as remittance and phone card services. Some dormitories already do this, and the workers who the COI interviewed there were glad to have these conveniences nearby. Dormitory-based provision shops, especially if reasonably priced, could also encourage some workers to stay at their dormitory rather than travel out to a congregation area.

214. The COI further recommends that agencies managing congregation areas form platforms which, among other things, seek regular input from key community stakeholders on the ground, such as residents and shopowners. The government can then take into account the practical needs of all parties to consider whether decongestion measures – such as pedestrianising parts of overcrowded congregation areas or constructing new buildings or shelters for those who congregate there – can and should be adopted.

Alcohol Consumption and Intoxication

Recommendation

To more strictly enforce against public drunkenness and set in place alcohol restrictions in hotspots where large crowds typically indulge in heavy drinking, and therefore where a triggering incident could spark a breakdown of public order.

Discussion

215. During the public hearing, the COI heard many views on what should be done about the sale and consumption of alcohol in Little India and beyond. Some said the government should limit the sale of alcohol by curtailing the number of liquor licenses issued, or limiting hours of sale. Others said that the government should ban the public consumption of alcohol in non-licensed venues altogether, in Little India and across the island. Views on how to deal with the issue of alcohol in Little India and beyond remain divided.

216. In the course of the Inquiry, the COI came to know that the number of liquor licenses issued to businesses in Little India has not increased over the past five years; the number has been stable, and actually declined slightly over the past three years. While there was no hard data available on the rate of public intoxication in Little India, anecdotal evidence suggested that it was an increasing problem in the area. This is possible without an increase in liquor licenses: people can buy more liquor from the same number of stores. Indeed, when liquor restrictions were put in place following the riot, all of the business owners who testified before the COI stated that their revenue dropped drastically on account of the poorer liquor sales – in one case, the shopkeeper's overall business declined by 80%. This shows how large a proportion liquor sales comprised for business in the area.

217. While some restrictions on where alcohol can be sold might be needed, simply limiting the number of liquor licenses in the area is not the solution. If people wish to procure alcohol, they are able to do so regardless of the number of liquor licenses available, so long as those who have those licenses are willing to stock and sell ever-larger quantities.

218. The COI does not think that the riot merits an island-wide ban on public alcohol consumption. An island-wide ban affects a large number of people in a large number of circumstances, much of which need not to be policed. The ban would also disproportionately favour businesses who own liquor licenses for on-site consumption, as individuals who wish to socialise over drinks would

now only be able to purchase and consume alcohol on such premises. A family that opens a bottle of wine at a picnic or a group of friends sharing some beers at a barbeque need not be curtailed.

219. It is the COI's view that this measure should be targeted at hotspots, i.e. areas where large crowds typically indulge in heavy drinking, and therefore where a triggering event could spark a breakdown of public order. We saw this happen in Little India, and it may happen in other areas, such as Geylang. The COI recommends a dual approach:

- i. To more strictly enforce against public drunkenness in hotspots, and
- ii. To consider setting in place restrictions on the consumption of alcohol in hotspots.

220. The first point, on enforcement, refers to section 18 of the Miscellaneous Offences (Public Order and Nuisance) Act (Cap. 184) (MOA), which criminalises the following behaviour:

Drunkenness in public places

18. Any person who is found drunk and incapable of taking care of himself, in any public road or in any public place or place of public amusement or resort, or in the immediate vicinity of any court or of any public office or police station or place of worship, shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding \$1,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding one month and, in the case of a second or subsequent conviction, to a fine not exceeding \$2,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 3 months.

221. SPF witnesses, when asked about this provision, testified that the main purpose of SPF patrols in Little India was to deter crime. They would only arrest persons under section 18 of the MOA if they were truly incapable of taking care of themselves; specifically, if the officers were unable to wake an unconscious intoxicated individual, or if that individual did not seem able to see himself home. APO witnesses gave similar testimony, and that they would only arrest persons under this section if they were creating a disturbance or committing another offence. SPF witnesses said that they would like to do more to address public drunkenness, but explained that with limited manpower, it was difficult to devote too many officers to enforce against this offence instead of fighting more serious crimes.

222. In the view of the COI, more vigilant enforcement of section 18 of the MOA in hotspots would help to mitigate the effects of excessive drinking and the public order threat this presents. It would also deter individuals against

drinking excessively to the point of causing a nuisance for others, for example by falling asleep in public or residential areas, or causing disturbances to others.

223. The COI understands the manpower difficulties SPF might face in enforcing this more strictly. While the COI believes SPF should nevertheless try to do so in hotspots, SPF could also consider less manpower-intensive methods. For instance, more widely publicising the offence and its consequences, using scientific criteria to define and determine the threshold for the offence (as is done for drink driving), and extending powers to deal with section 18 of the MOA offences to APOs as a measure to bolster SPF's patrols.

224. On the second point, restrictions on the consumption of alcohol in hotspots, SPF witnesses testified that MHA was conducting a review and public consultation on the liquor regulatory framework. The findings from the public consultation should inform any changes to the framework.

225. The COI supports the concept of restricting, in hotspots, the hours or places in which one may publicly consume alcohol. However, the COI is of the view that such restrictions should not target eateries (which are licensed to sell or serve alcohol), nor their immediate vicinities. In particular, the COI recommends targeting the consumption of alcohol which occurs away from eateries and outside buildings, in truly public areas, such as walkways and playgrounds.

Observations on Improving the Lives of Foreign Workers

226. Earlier in this report, the COI discussed foreign workers' employment and living conditions in Singapore, and found that these were not the cause of the riot on 8 December 2013. Nevertheless, the COI acknowledges that there is still room for improvement on these fronts. While the vast majority of foreign workers today do not have major complaints about their jobs or living quarters in Singapore, we must be on guard for any deterioration in this situation. We do not want public order incidents to arise in the future because of foreign worker dissatisfaction with their employment or living conditions.

227. The COI has thus recorded some observations relating to the treatment of migrant workers in this report, which may be useful to the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) and other relevant agencies.

Foreign Workers' Legal Rights and Protections

228. The COI looked at the rights and protections afforded to foreign workers in Singapore. Under the Employment Act (Cap. 91), the Work Injury Compensation Act (Cap. 354), the Workplace Safety and Health Act (Cap. 354A), the Employment Agencies Act (Cap. 92), and the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act (Cap. 91A), employers' obligations to foreign workers include:

- Timely and regular payment of the declared monthly salary;
- Provision of rest days;
- Provision of overtime pay;
- Limitation on working hours;
- Provision of work injury compensation for workers who suffer work-related injuries or illnesses;
- Provision of upkeep and maintenance throughout the stay of the foreign worker;
- Provision of acceptable housing for the duration of the foreign worker's stay;
- Purchase of medical insurance for workers (mandatory coverage of \$15,000 a year) and payment of medical treatment expenses (both outpatient and hospitalisation); and
- Amicable resolution of all employment-related disputes with the foreign worker.

229. These legislative requirements are enforced by MOM. MOM requires employers to provide written acknowledgement of the above responsibilities when they apply for a work permit. MOM also conducts enforcement operations targeting errant employers who provide unacceptable housing to workers, or who withhold salaries, or who do not pay their workers compensation for work-related injuries, and so on. Employers found to be in breach of the rules are required to provide restitution to the worker, and egregious employers may be warned, fined, or prosecuted in court.

230. Over the years, MOM has also worked with other agencies to build recreation centres to meet the social needs of foreign workers. There are four such centres today: in Soon Lee, Woodlands, Penjuru, and Kaki Bukit. The centres provide amenities such as supermarkets, food courts, sports facilities, provision shops, clothing stores, internet cafes, beer gardens, telecommunications shops, barbers, amphitheatres, reading rooms, and remittance services. The centres host programmes for the workers, such as sport competitions, performances, cultural celebrations, movie screenings, mobile clinics, and bazaars.

231. MOM, together with other government agencies and NGOs, also invests in significant outreach efforts. MOM, NEA and SPF conduct dormitory roadshows and mandatory training courses, distribute guidebooks in the native languages of the foreign workers, and provide detailed pre-departure information to foreign workers while they are still in their home countries. The purpose of these activities and materials is to educate foreign workers on their rights in Singapore, on their responsibilities as workers here, and on Singaporean social norms.

232. In the course of the Inquiry, the COI spoke personally with many foreign workers. All whom the COI asked were aware that if they had any problems with their employment or living quarters, they should approach MOM. They knew the appropriate number to call, and said that they did not feel afraid of making a complaint. This satisfied us that MOM's and the NGOs' outreach efforts had paid off, and that workers were generally aware of their rights, and who to call if they encountered problems.

233. The above being said, the COI heard of some common problems from a variety of foreign workers whom it spoke with. These are dealt with below.

High Foreign Employment Agency Fees

234. One of the difficulties faced by many foreign workers is the high cost of engaging employment agents in their home countries. Such costs often put the

workers into heavy debt for significant periods of time. MOM regulates the fees charged by employment agents in Singapore, but is not able to do the same with agents registered overseas. However, the COI hopes that something can be done, perhaps on a bilateral basis, to improve this situation for foreign workers. It is also incumbent on employment agencies to be ethical when selecting foreign agencies to partner.

235. While MOM and employment agents may not be able to change the practices of these foreign agencies, there are things that can be done in Singapore to help ameliorate the situation for foreign workers. Some of the workers the COI spoke with were very happy with their companies, in large part because they received regular salary increments – even increases of \$1-2 in their daily wage were welcomed. MOM could consider working with employer associations to encourage annual increments as a norm in the industry. Such a practice would give the workers greater hope of being able to overcome their debt more quickly.

Education on Employment Processes

236. The COI suggests that more effort be made to fully educate foreign workers not just on their general rights and protections, but also on specific employment processes. Singapore's employment processes for foreign workers are robust, and workers must be well-educated on what the processes entail and how to take advantage of them. The COI was told that the majority of MOM's educational efforts detailed above only commenced in 2009, and the extent of its reach may not yet have reached the entire foreign worker community here.

237. The COI heard, at the public hearing, of workers who were still hesitant and unsure of their rights in relation to specific processes. For instance, workers are able to make workplace injury claims directly with MOM, without going through their employers. In addition, workers who submit salary or workplace injury claims cannot be repatriated by their employers while their claims are pending. However, witnesses who work in NGOs that help foreign workers reported that some workers were still reluctant to report workplace injuries – sometimes putting it off for months – because they thought that they had to do so through their employers, and were afraid of being repatriated as a result of their complaint. If the recourse provided by Singapore's laws is to be realised for these workers, it is essential that they are educated on specific processes, especially for claims against their employers.

238. Besides existing formal channels to inform workers of their legal rights and protections, there is scope for government agencies to work with employers and NGOs to reach out to the workers through less formal, more interactive and

engaging channels on a regular basis. It would also help to spend more effort sensitising workers to the social norms in Singapore. This could include some basic training in English or key English phrases, which would help the workers in their work, and make it easier for them to communicate with Singaporeans.

Sensitivity when Dealing with Foreign Workers

239. The COI heard testimony from witnesses citing instances where they felt there was a lack of sensitivity on the part of APOs in dealing with foreign workers, be it for enforcement action taken against acts of disamenities, or in the way they might ask them to leave an area (such as a void deck). Some witnesses also testified that the strict way in which Ms Wong dealt with the foreign workers queuing for the bus may have fostered a measure of unhappiness amongst some of them.

240. Those who have to manage congregation areas are often in a difficult position, treading the line between the need to be strict (and residents' desire for them to be strict) and being flexible. While acknowledging that, the COI's view is that we should strive towards creating a friendlier environment for foreign workers, many of whom may be new to Singaporean norms and culture and do not understand local languages. The COI suggests that staff who have to frequently interact with foreign workers – bus drivers, timekeepers, APOs, and even SPF officers – should be given some basic training in cultural sensitivity and an appreciation of the role that foreign workers play in Singapore. In particular, training which covers basic or key words in the workers' native languages would go a long way towards fostering greater understanding and communication. If the situation demands firmness in action, such officers should do so with respect, without acting in a manner insolent to the workers' dignity.

The Role of Employers and Community Support Groups

241. The role of employers and community support groups is critical in ensuring that foreign workers receive the support and necessary welfare they need. Employers here need to take responsibility for the welfare and well-being of their workers beyond just paying them a salary. In this regard, employer groups should consider setting up and funding support communities for foreign workers. These can be done through engaging the help of NGOs and community volunteers concerned about foreign worker issues.

242. For example, in the course of the Inquiry, the COI came to know of a group called the Friends of Thai Workers Association. This is a small volunteer organisation based in Golden Mile Complex, an area popular with Thai workers.

Their mission is to help Thai workers in Singapore in any way they can, from helping to set up medical appointments, helping workers understand local laws, helping them to report employment problems to MOM, and teaching them English.

243. Although MOM and the NGOs already do much good work to help the foreign workers in Singapore, the COI feels that the foreign worker communities would also benefit from such support groups. Employers of foreign workers should take a keen interest in the welfare of their employees, and working with MOM and NGOs on similar support groups, if properly managed, would be a good step forward.

Improvements to Accommodation

244. The COI heard testimony from multiple witnesses, including foreign workers, that the housing available to foreign workers in Singapore ranks well in the world. This is something Singapore can be proud of, but there is always room for improvement.

245. Foreign workers make important contributions to Singapore. They work long hours doing hard labour which many Singaporeans would not be willing to take on. Foreign workers build our homes, clean our streets, and look after our sick and elderly. Their contributions to Singapore should be appreciated. The COI supports initiatives to better the accommodation facilities available to foreign workers here, especially in terms of services, amenities, and recreation. Even small improvements can significantly better workers' bare lives.

Summary of Recommendations

246. In summary, the COI's recommendations are:

1. To improve SPF's communications, command and control capabilities, to help officers dealing with public order incidents build a better picture of the ground situation, especially in rapidly changing scenarios.
2. To appropriately train and equip frontline officers from the Land Divisions and NPCs to effectively defuse and contain large-scale public order incidents.
3. To increase SPF's manpower resources, including the SOC, so that they can better manage mass congregation areas such as Little India, and be ready to deal with large-scale public order incidents. However, quality rather than quantity should be the major consideration in augmenting the force.
4. That SPF and SCDF continue to build on their ability to respond in a concerted and co-ordinated manner to public order situations, such as that seen on 8 December 2013.
5. That SPF look into generally cutting layers of approval or time needed to activate essential resources to respond to public order incidents and other emergencies.
6. To install additional lighting, safety and surveillance devices in areas which see large congregations of foreign workers, in addition to making better basic facilities available to those who congregate there.
7. To make more services and amenities available to foreign workers outside of congregation areas, and to work with local community stakeholders on measures to reduce congestion at congregation areas.
8. To more strictly enforce against public drunkenness and set in place alcohol restrictions in hotspots where large crowds typically indulge in heavy drinking, and therefore where a triggering incident could spark a breakdown of public order.

Submission of Report

Pursuant to the Terms of Reference, the COI is pleased to submit its report of the proceedings, findings, and recommendations for the Minister's consideration.

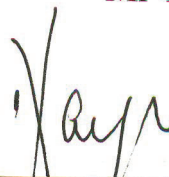
Dated 27 June 2014



Mr G Pannir Selvam
Chairman



Mr Tee Tua Ba
Member



Mr John De Payva
Member



Mr Andrew Chua Thiam Chwee
Member

Annexes

A. List of Witnesses at the Public Hearing

B. Summary of Evidence Led at the Public Hearing