

Chin Peng: Let me return home
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The exiled leader of a bloody communist insurgency in Malaysia said in remarks published here today that Kuala Lumpur must not block his return despite warnings it may spark unrest.

Chin Peng, 85, a feared guerrilla commander and anti-colonial campaigner in the heyday of the Communist Party of Malaya in the 1940s and 1950s, expressed no remorse in a rare interview with Singapore's *Straits Times*.

"There is no use to dwell in the past. All I want is that the Malaysian government honours the agreements we signed," he told the newspaper in Bangkok, where he now lives while campaigning for the right to return home.

"I think if I had the chance to talk to the (Malaysian) public directly, I can convince them that my return won't pose a problem but could help the situation," he was quoted as saying.

But he admitted "it will be a hard struggle to convince the people, especially the Malays."

Analysts say the government fears that Chin Peng's return could upset the country's dominant Malays and raise social tensions because the party was seen as an ethnic Chinese-led group influenced by Beijing.

Members of Malaysia's ruling coalition have pushed for leniency for the former fighter. Opponents including families of communist victims and veterans of the strife-torn period known as the Malayan Emergency object to his return.

Let's start a new journey

Asked to name the historical leaders he admired most, Chin Peng singled out communist China's founder Mao Zedong in the interview, but he conceded that "for many people, Mao was not the perfect leader."

Chin Peng's party signed a peace agreement with the Malaysian government in 1989 that allowed several other high-ranking communist leaders to return but he was shut out, and lost his final legal appeal in April.

Born as Ong Boon Hua in Perak, Chin Peng is portrayed in Malaysian history books as a ruthless communist responsible for civilian deaths in what was then the British colony of Malaya, which included Singapore.

But he is also famous for his key role in the anti-Japanese resistance during World War II, receiving the prestigious Order of the British Empire before he returned to armed struggle in the Thai-Malaysian border region.

Asked what message he would like to send to those opposing his homecoming, he told the *Straits Times*: "I think we should not pay too much attention to what happened in the past.

"We need to start to build a new relationship. People will say it is easier said than done. But if we dwell on the past there will be no end. Let us start a new journey," he added.

- AFP

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