

STATEMENT TO PARLIAMENT
ON THE SITUATION IN SARAWAK
BY Y.A.B. TIMBALAN PERDANA MENTERI
ON MONDAY, 19TH SEPTEMBER, 1966.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government has asked for this Emergency Meeting of Parliament today in order to enable the Government to acquaint the Honourable Members of this House and of the Senate of the serious situation that has developed in Sarawak in the last several days. This serious situation poses a grave threat not only to the security of the State of Sarawak but also to the whole country. In order to deal with this situation the Government has proposed to take measures which are contained in the Bill that intend to introduce to this House immediately after this.

As Honourable Members are aware, for some months since the middle of June this year, there has been a constitution and political crisis in Sarawak. This crisis started on the 14th of June, 1966, when twenty-one members of the Council Negeri wrote a letter to the Governor stating that they no longer had confidence in Dato Stephen Kalong Ningkan as Chief Minister and this letter was handed to the Governor on the 16th of June, 1966. The Governor of Sarawak, after satisfying himself that these members really and truly had no confidence in the Chief Minister and that the Chief Minister had ceased to command the confidence of the majority of the members of the Council Negeri, called on Dato Stephen Kalong Ningkan to tender his resignation and that of the members of the Supreme Council on the 16th of June, 1966. As Dato Stephen Kalong Ningkan was ill and could not present himself to the Astana to see the Governor, he wrote to the Governor indicating that he did not wish to tender his resignation; whereupon on the 17th of June, the Governor wrote to Dato' Stephen Kalong Ningkan stating that as he had refused to tender his resignation and that of the members of his Supreme Council, the Governor declared that Dato' Stephen Kalong Ningkan and members of his Supreme Council had ceased to hold office with immediate effect and appointed the Honourable Penghulu Tawi Sli, the leader of the majority group in the Council

Negeri, to form the Government and appointed him as the Chief Minister.

As a result of this, Dato Stephen Kalong Ningkan instituted proceedings in the Sarawak High Court requesting a declaration by the Court that the Governor had acted unconstitutionally and that his dismissal as Chief Minister was ultra vires and void. The High Court of Sarawak declared in a Judgement announced on the 7th of September, that the Governor had no power to dismiss the Chief Minister under the present Constitution of the State of Sarawak and that the only way to show the loss of confidence of the Members of the Council Negeri in its Chief Minister is by a vote on the floor of the House. The Court had, therefore, declared that Dato Stephen Kalong Ningkan was still de jure Chief Minister of Sarawak. As a result of this, twenty-five members out of the forty-two members of the Council Negeri of Sarawak who had lost confidence in Dato Stephen Kalong Ningkan wrote a letter to the Speaker, with a copy to the Chief Minister, requesting the Speaker to convene a meeting of the Council Negeri in order to test the confidence of Dato Stephen Kalong Ningkan as Chief Minister. The Speaker replied to that letter stating that he had no power to call a meeting of the Council Negeri and that the Council Negeri could only be convened at the request of the Supreme Council or of the Governor acting on the advice of the Council. Since that day, the twenty-five members had repeatedly made a request to the Governor to convene a meeting and the Governor wrote three times to the Chief Minister and twice to the Speaker requesting that a meeting of the Council Negeri be held in order to resolve this deadlock.

Although the Court had declared Dato Stephen Kalong Ningkan as de jure Chief Minister, it was clear that the majority of the members of the Council Negeri had expressed a lack of confidence in him and following accepted democratic practice it would be the duty of the Chief Minister in such circumstances not only to convene a meeting of the Council Negeri but also to tender his resignation. It was clear that the Chief Minister had refused to do either and the Governor had no power to convene a meeting of the Council Negeri. This political deadlock had caused the situation in Sarawak to deteriorate seriously during the last few days. It is clear that with the already serious security situation posed by the Communist Clandestine Organisation the situation constitutes a very grave

security threat not only to Sarawak but to the whole of Malaysia.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to inform Honourable Members that the general security situation in Sarawak, despite the end of confrontation and the signing of the Peace Treaty with Indonesia, remains very tense. This is clearly explained by a Government Paper which is tabled before this House today. The strong and entrenched Communist Organisation has been in existence in Sarawak for several years. It now comprises over a thousand hard-core members and several thousands supporters and sympathisers throughout this region. An assesment of documents captured over the past few months and in the interrogation of captured Communist elements indicate beyond any doubt that the Sarawak Communist Organisation has been making preparation for an armed struggle in the State.

An important directing cadre of the Sarawak Communist Organisation attended a recent Afro-Asian Writers' Emergency Meeting held in Peking from the 27th June to the 9th July. At this meeting, a resolution on 'North Kalimantan' was passed which reflects current intentions of the Chinese Communist Party towards Sarawak in the immediate future. The resolution stated that "the line of struggle for national liberation of North Kalimantan is to take up arms and fight resolutely until Malaysia is completely crushed." And in order to wage armed strunggle it is necessary to have the courage to stir up prasants and take roots in the rural areas because it is only in this way that it is possible to apply the strategy of using the rural areas to surround the towns and cities. Also, following the aftermath of the Brunei rebellion, it was estimated about seven hundred members and supporters of the Sarawak Communist Organisation had crossed the border into Indonesia to receive intensive indoctrination of Communist ideology and training in guerilla warfare by the P.K.I. A large number of these people who have completed their training, have now returned to Sarawak to step up the guerilla war, and the remainder have now organised themselves into several armed units which are operating along the border from several established bases. Also, during the period of Confrontation, when Government security forces were busly engaged against external threat, Communist elements in Sarawak had taken the opportunity to prepare several bases for eventual armed struggle.

Within the last few months, there have been serious preparations

and activities by the Sarawak Communists as clearly shown by the following facts :-

- (a) Reliable reports of arms training in five separate areas of First Division;
- (b) The discovery by Security Forces of four Communist jungle camps found in First, Second and another in Third Divisions;
- (c) Two Communist arms dumps recovered near Sibu earlier this year and, in August 66, 3 arms dumps were recovered near the 30th mile along the Kuching/Serian Road. The latter contained Sten guns, hand grenades, TNT slabs, anti-personel mines and a large amount of miscellaneous ammunition;
- (d) The discovery by Security Forces of seven secret well-constructed and sophisticated hiding places. Three in First Division, three in Second Division and one in Third Division. These were to harbour armed returnees from Kalimantan and to be used as guerilla warfare bases. Reports of many others are under investigation;
- (e) Lastly, there have been two major incursions by armed Sarawak Communists into First Division this year. The aims of each were to set up a small Communist liberated area, train local Communist cadres and to expand guerilla warfare.

In order to give the Communists and their supporters a chance to give up their struggle following the Bangkok talks, the Government issued surrender terms to all those who had taken up arms or joined illegal subversive organisations. So far only ten persons have given up and it is quite clear that the remainder wish to continue their defiance of the Government.

Apart from the armed struggle, the Sarawak Communist Organisation has made considerable progress in its constitutional struggle. Honourable Members are already aware that Communist penetration of the Sarawak United Peoples Party (SUPP) is widespread at Branch level, and Communist presence there is reflected from time to time in various aspects of illegal activity often embarrassing to SUPP party leadership. The United Front is also working hard in the Trade Unions and in Sarawak Schools. Thus the Communist United Front in Sarawak is well led and able to take advantage of any situation as it arises.

The Communist Organisation in Sarawak and along the Indonesian border has organised a widespread United Front and has passed the point of no return in its preparation for the armed struggle. The security position in Sarawak is, in many ways, approaching the same state of preparedness for their armed struggle as was achieved by the Communist Party of Malaya in 1948.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it can be clearly seen that the security situation posed by the Communists in Sarawak is serious and the Government is taking appropriate measures to deal with the situation. However, with the withdrawal of the British and Commonwealth troops from Sabah and Sarawak, our own security forces will be completely stretched to deal with the Communist situation in Sarawak as well as on the borders between Thailand and Malaysia. Thus, if in addition to dealing with the serious Communist threat there is political unrest and uncertainty, quite obviously the Government with its existing resources might well find it difficult to cope with the situation. The Government's plan for meeting this Communist threat has been in the past, and still is at present, based on the assumption that there is political stability in the country and there is a stable Government both at the Federal and at the State level.

The Federal Government, therefore, taking all these factors into consideration came to the conclusion that the present serious situation due to the constitutional and political crisis in Sarawak in addition to the already serious security threat of the country by the Communist Organisation poses a grave threat to the security of Sarawak as well as the whole of Malaysia. The Federal Government, therefore, considered that in the interest of peace and security of Malaysia and of Sarawak for which the Federal Government is responsible, it must take measures to bring an end to this political instability.

Having given careful and serious consideration to all these matters, the Cabinet on Wednesday, 14th of September, 1966, had advised the Yang di-Pertua Agong to proclaim under Article 150(1) of the Constitution a State of Emergency for the State of Sarawak and to summon Parliament so that necessary legislation be passed to deal with the situation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to state that the measures proposed

by the Government are merely to see that real democracy is practised in Sarawak and accepted democratic practices are adhered to. As I have explained, the Constitutional and political position in Sarawak is that the Chief Minister who knows that he does not enjoy the confidence of the Council Negeri is duty bound under democratic principles and Convention and the spirit of the Constitution not only to convene a meeting of Council Negeri to test members' confidence in him but also to tender his resignation when he has lost their confidence. In the present circumstances, it clearly shows that the Chief Minister does not want to follow these accepted democratic practices. Therefore, it is proposed to introduce a Bill to this House immediately after this to fill a gap or lacuna in the Constitution of the State of Sarawak to give the Governor powers to convene a meeting of the Council Negeri in order that the Question of confidence in the present Government of Sarawak may be put to the test and also the power to dismiss the Chief Minister or the Government from office if that Government or that Chief Minister refuses to resign after he has received a vote of non-confidence in the Council Negeri.

Therefore, Sir, it can be seen that the measures proposed by the Government are neither abnormal nor drastic. They are measures strictly in accordance with the principles of our democratic Constitution - measures which are designed to secure compliance with accepted democratic practice. If the present Government of Sarawak secures a majority support, then, of course, they carry on with the Government. But if they are defeated by a vote of no-confidence, then following accepted democratic practice, a new Government will take its place which will command the confidence of the majority of the members of the Council Negeri. There is no suggestion of an administrative take-over, or of government by decree. The democratic process will take its course, and any measures adopted to deal with the situation will have the full weight of the authority of this House of Parliament. These measures are to ensure that democratic principles are upheld and adopted to the letter and the spirit of the Constitution.

The Federal Government has indicated on a number of occasions that it resolved to introduce direct elections in the State of Sarawak as soon as practicable and preparations towards this end are now in train and it is confident that a General Election will be held sometime next year. The measures now proposed are designed merely to

maintain political stability during the interim period until the General Elections so that Sarawak will have a stable Government to enable us to face the serious Communist threat to the security of the State. I would also like to add, Sir, that the measures proposed are merely temporary to last only for the duration of the State of Emergency that has just been proclaimed. With the end of this State of Emergency, the provisions under the legislation which is before the House now will lapse. I repeat, Sir, these provisions are temporary and will lapse under Article 150(7) of the Constitution six months after the State of Emergency comes to an end.

I would like, Sir, Members of this House, particularly those from Sarawak and the members of the public in general, and again in particular, those from Sarawak, to keep calm and to cooperate with the Government in every way possible to maintain law and order. The Government, through its Information Services, Radio and Television, will do its best to keep the public informed from time to time on any developments. I would ask members of the public not to listen to any rumours and not to do anything that would aggravate the already serious security situation and to do everything possible to assist our security forces in maintaining law and order. As I have said and I repeat again, Sir, the measures the Government had decided to take are not in any way abnormal. They are measures provided for under our Constitution to ensure that the principles of democracy are upheld and accepted democratic practices are complied with. I would like, Sir, to pay my tribute to the governor and the sensible and loyal leaders in Sarawak who had maintained considerable patience and showed such courage during these weeks and days of trials and anxiety and I do hope that these measures, when approved by Parliament, will bring an end to the present serious constitutional and political crisis and that the Government and the people will stand together solidly to face the enemies of the State who are doing all they can to bring chaos and unrest to our country and to destroy our democratic way of life and all that we stand for.

In conclusion, I would like to appeal to members of this House and the country at large that we are still faced with a serious Communist threat to our existence, to our independence and sovereignty, and I would ask all of you to place the interests of our country and our people above everything else and that we must be prepared to make any sacrifice and pay any price for our freedom and our happiness and for the peace and security of our country.