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Mike Lucas
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Mr Speaker

Mr President

INCIDENT INVOLVING A MINISTER

On Monday evening 16 September 2002 the Chairman of the Chinese National People's Congress, Mr Li Peng was the guest of honour at a formal dinner in the Members' Hall of Parliament House, attended by a number of invited guests including senators and members.

Owing to the sensitivities involved in the visit, a high level threat assessment had been issued through the Protective Security Co-ordination Centre, requiring a number of agencies, including the Parliamentary Security Service, to contribute to an unusually heavy layer of security arrangements. Coupled with the high threat assessment was the fact that the venue of the dinner was a relatively open area.

Of major concern was the possibility of a threat to the dignity of the guest of honour or the event by protest action whilst in the building. Thus additional static PSS staff were deployed at the fringes of the venue, including the first and second floor balconies overlooking the Member's Hall, to enforce an exclusion zone provided by rope barriers.

During the course of the evening the Minister for Science, the Hon Peter McGauran complained to the deputy security controller that he had been challenged by a PSS officer whilst attempting to observe the event from the first floor.

It appears that at approximately 8.15pm, Minister McGauran, who subsequently stated he had deliberately not accepted his invitation to attend the dinner, walked unobserved from behind a pillar located to the rear of the PSS officer on duty on the 1st floor. He was coatless and stepped across the rope barrier and proceeded to walk across the exclusion zone towards the balcony railing. He later stated that his intention was to observe who was in attendance at the dinner.

The PSS-officer on duty could not determine the identity of the person at this stage since his view was from the rear and reacted instinctively, intercepting the Minister before he could reach the balcony rail. He took him gently by the elbow to halt his progress and challenged him verbally. Upon turning around, the Minister was immediately identified and the PSS officer withdrew his grasp and apologised.

The PSS officer then indicated the obvious security exclusion zone and advised the Minister that he was officially controlling access to the area in compliance with the Security Operational Order relating to the Chairman's visit. The Minister asked if the restriction applied to members of the government. The officer replied that his instructions were to deny access to all persons and to call either the PSS Supervisor or the Deputy Security Controller if there were any challenges to the performance of his duties.

Minister McGauran then asked that a senior member of the security staff report to him to explain the situation.

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As a result, the Deputy Security Controller then attended the National Party Room and had a discussion with the Minister in the corridor.

Minister McGauran expressed his position that any Minister, Member or Senator should have free access to all areas of the house at all times. The Deputy Security Controller apologised for any inconvenience or embarrassment occasioned. He assured the Minister that no discourtesy or disrespect was intended and the challenge to him had been as a result of lack of opportunity to identify him prior to the challenge. The Minister then questioned the authority under which the exclusion zone around the first floor balcony had been established. He was advised that the cordon had been established at the direction of the Security Controller, in accordance with the assessed threat level to guest of honour, on behalf of the Presiding Officers.

The Deputy Security Controller then attended the Speaker's Senior Adviser's office and advised him as to what had just taken place.

The following evening the Deputy Security Controller received a telephone call from the Minister asking if there was anything further to report subsequent to their discussion of Monday evening. The Minister was advised that the Speaker's Senior Adviser had been briefed about the incident and thus the Speaker was aware of the Minister's concerns. The Minister stated that he intended to pursue the issue of member's access rights with the Speaker.

(Mike Lucas)
Security Controller

cc Usher of the Black Rod
 Serjeant at Arms
 Clerk of the House of Representatives
 Secretary, Joint House Department (Chair, Security Board of Management)

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