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Pirapaharan 2, Chapter 5 The Second Massacre

by **T. Sabaratnam**

(Volume 2)

5. The Second Massacre

The prison massacre on Monday, July 25, 1983 that killed 35 of their colleagues made the 28 prisoners in C3 feel insecure. They felt that they would be the next target. Three of them - Panagoda Maheswaran, Paranthan Rajan and Douglas Devananda - met Leo de Silva at 3 p.m. on Tuesday, 26 July, and raised the question of their security. They asked him to unlock their cells and allow them to be together in the passage so that they could defend themselves.

The same night, Magistrate Wijewardene, who held the inquest into the deaths on July 25, told prison authorities to ensure the security of the surviving Tamil prisoners.

The international reaction of revulsion and horror also prompted the prison authorities and the Justice Ministry to act on the magistrate's recommendation.

Chief Jailor, W. M. Karunaratne, told Jansz on Tuesday morning that he had learnt through the prison intelligence sources about a plan for a jailbreak and an attack on the remaining Tamil prisoners. The information was conveyed to Justice Ministry secretary Wijesinghe.

The prisoners in C3 were transferred to the ground floor of the YOB around noon on Wednesday, 27 July. The group of nine professionals held on the ground floor were shifted to the first floor of that building.

Tuesday was a quiet day for the Tamil prisoners. The prison was incident-free. But violence continued on a reduced scale in Colombo and spread to other parts of the country. Curfew was clamped at 2 p.m. on Monday, but attacks on Tamil continued. The organized instigators withdrew after curfew was announced, but mob attacks persisted. The criminal and lower sectors of the Sinhala people, suddenly elevated to the status of protectors of the Sinhala race, rampaged and plundered.

Groups of policemen armed with loud hailers and trucks went round the areas under their jurisdiction gathering the Tamil people who were shielded by Sinhala neighbours and who had taken refuge in schools, temples and churches and transported them to the refugee centres that sprang in most parts of the Colombo city and suburbs.

On Tuesday morning, Army Commander Tissa Weeratunga drove from the Army Headquarters along Galle Road to assess the damage caused on Monday. In Kollupitiya, he saw a mob trying to set fire to Gnanam's Building. Gnanam is a successful Tamil businessman who owned several industrial and business ventures. The army patrol which provided security to the army commander stopped close to the mob and Major Sunil Peiris who was in the patrol car went to arrest the elderly-looking leader of the mob. Some in the mob told him that that elderly man was "*amethi thuma*" (Honourable Minister). Major Peiris then returned to the patrol car, but noticed the minister's car and his security waiting close by.

"The honourable minister" was Cyril Mathew. When informed that Major Peiris had tried to arrest him, Mathew left the place in a hurry and went to the Presidential Secretariat and complained to President Jayewardene. Mathew wanted Major Peiris to apologize to him. Jayewardene asked Peiris when he met him at the army headquarters that evening to apologize to Mathew. Peiris declined to do so. He told Jayewardene that he only tried to do his duty and he did not know that Mathew was there. Jayewardene dropped the matter at that. Gnanam, who was a friend of Jayewardene, reported the incident to him.

On Tuesday, the riots spread to Kandy, which had been calm on Monday and Tuesday morning. Frank de Silva, Deputy Inspector General of Police, Kandy deployed additional police to guard the city. Monday passed without any incident. On Tuesday morning, he saw a crowd gathering near the market. He ordered the police to disperse them. The crowd melted and gathered in another place. He realized that the men in the crowd were men from the Sinha Regiment Battalion stationed in Kandy.

In the evening, after the JSS goon squads from Colombo reached Kandy, the city erupted. The squad was transported by Mathew's people in state-owned buses. The crowd joined the soldiers and the JSS goons attacked the Tamils found on the roads, burnt their vehicles, torched Tamil houses and damaged Tamil-owned shops and business establishments.

Several stories about the inhuman treatment meted out to the Tamils in Kandy are on record. The one that was recorded by a Dutchman could serve as a sample. X was a Tamil who ran a stall on Main Street. A mob set upon him. It set fire to

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the stall. It caught X, who tried to escape. The mob threw him onto the tin roof of the burning stall. Twice he rolled down and fell on the ground. The third time the body stuck to the roof and burnt with the shop. The Dutchman commented: "I have not seen such barbarism anywhere in the world."

A similar blood-curdling incident that occurred on Monday was recorded by a Norwegian woman tourist. A mob halted a minibus with a full load of passengers that entered Colombo. It ordered all but Tamils to disembark. It then closed the shutters and the doors. It doused the vehicle with petrol and set fire to it. The occupants, around 20, begged and shouted. Some broke the glass shutters and tried to jump out. The yelling mob pushed them in and enjoyed the gruesome sight.

On Tuesday, the riots also spread to Negombo, Chilaw and Puttalam. Tamil shops and houses in these cities were attacked by UNP agents. The man who led the attack in Puttalam was a private secretary of the deputy minister from that area. He was later arrested and remanded. D. E. W. Gunasekera, who contested for the post of Speaker on 22 April 2004, met him in prison. (The circumstance in which D. E. W. Gunasekera went to jail will be told in a subsequent chapter which deals with the Naxalite Plot).

The following excerpt is from the article 'Black July: Recollections,' which he wrote in the *Daily News* of 30 July 1999:

"I must reveal how a Private Secretary of a deputy minister from Puttalam district who was taken into custody for arson, approached me to draft a petition to J. R. Jayewardene, seeking his release. I promptly obliged, even though he was a UNPer.

"The revealing thing was that he merely carried out orders of his minister to set fire to a line of Tamil shops. Response to the petition I drafted for him was so fast that he was released the following day. Deputy minister himself called over to take him away. That was how justice prevailed."

From Kandy, the violence spread to Gampola, Nawalapitiya and Badulla on Wednesday, Passara on Thursday and Nuwara Eliya on Friday.

Cabinet Meeting

Unconcerned about the spread of the disturbances, Jayewardene held the weekly cabinet meeting on Wednesday morning. Ministers blamed the TULF and Amirthalingam for the riots and called Amirthalingam a traitor, a provocateur. Mathew pressed for the arrest of Amirthalingam and the banning of the TULF. Gamini Jayasuriya and Ranjith Attapattu backed him. Athulathmudali spoke about the heart-rending sights he had seen, the sight of the Sinhala people standing in long lines to buy food. He took credit for arranging the distribution of the stocks the Trade Ministry held through the network of cooperative stores.

Jayewardene told the ministers about his intention to enact an amendment to the constitution to punish any person and proscribe any party which advocates the division of the country. He said the punishment for the violations of that constitutional provision would be imprisonment and confiscation of property. That would take the steam out of Sinhalese anger, he said. Jayewardene and his Sinhala ministers did not utter a single word of sympathy for the affected Tamils.

Two ministers from the minority communities, Foreign Minister A. C. S. Hameed and Rural Industrial Development Minister S. Thondaman opposed Jayewardene's proposal. Hameed warned that the amendment would be counter-productive. It would harden the Tamils, not soften them. "You will only push the TULF to quit parliament. Then with whom are you going to talk? Your move will provide a role for India," he warned.

Thondaman said the move to ban the TULF would estrange the Tamil community and strengthen the armed groups. "Are you going to weaken the Tamil moderates and strengthen the armed groups?" Thondaman asked.

Neither Jayewardene nor the Sinhala ministers paid attention to Hameed and Thondaman's objections. They had their own plans and were concerned in implementing them. They wanted to weaken the Tamils into submissiveness. Jayewardene told Athulathmudali, Cabinet Secretary G. V. P. Samarasinghe and Legal Draftsman P. A. K. Rodrigo to draft the constitutional amendment. Then Jayewardene asked Gamini Dissanayake to arrange a meeting with Ven. Elle Gunawansa, the firebrand monk and live-wire of the Baudha Peramuna.

தமிழ்த் தேசிய ஆவணச் சுவடிகள்



Ven. Elle Gunawansa, 2003

Jayewardene then told the cabinet about the adverse international reaction Monday's prison massacre had generated. He said the remaining prisoners should be transferred to Jaffna prison. Ministers Mathew, Athulathmudali and Ranil Wickremesinghe objected, saying they would escape if sent to Jaffna. Jayewardene said the immediate concern was the prevention of a second massacre. After discussion, it was decided that the prisoners should be transferred to Batticaloa prison.

The Security Council, which met in the afternoon, considered the implementation of the cabinet decision. Jansz was invited for the meeting. Jayewardene greeted Jansz with the remark, "You must be tired after all that you have been through." He told an official to serve Jansz a glass of orange juice. Then he told Jansz that it would be unsafe to keep the prisoners in Colombo and briefed him about the cabinet decision and asked him to make arrangements to airlift the prisoners to Batticaloa. He was asked to liaise with Brigadier Mano Madawela.

Jansz returned to the prison by about 4.15 p.m. He was told the second attack was on. He rang Brigadier Madawela who was with Jayewardene at the Army Headquarters. Madawela briefed Jayewardene who asked Major Sunil Peiris, a pioneer commando in the Army, to handle the situation. He left to the prison immediately with a commando unit.

Dinner was served to the prisoners as usual at 4 p.m. Overseer Don Alfred served the meal to the prisoners in the ground floor of the Chapel Section. Alfred carried a bunch of keys as usual. Since C3 and D3 were empty he took the food to the entrance of A3, the wing in which condemned criminals and escapees were housed. He unlocked the door and asked the prisoners to come to receive their meal. A jailor stood guard.

Alfred told the second inquest, held on Thursday 28 July, that the prisoners rushed out, grabbed him, took the keys, threw away the telephone, assaulted the jailor and ran upstairs. There, he said, they instigated the other prisoners who joined them. The instigators, another witness Vocational Instructor Thilaharatne said, ran to the wood shed, broke it open and collected poles, axes, saws and other pointed instruments and ran towards the YOB.

The YOB is in a compound 50 meters east of the Chapel Section. It is surrounded by a two-meter tall wall. It has a gate opposite the prison's main entrance and a side gate. Don Nicholas, the jail guard on duty near the gate, said the attacking prisoners jumped over the wall and the other unarmed prisoners who followed them broke open the side gate. He said the attackers overpowered him and grabbed the bunch of keys. They opened the main entrance of the YOB with the keys and ran inside.

A group of attackers ran to the ground floor where 28 prisoners were housed and another group rushed upstairs where the nine professionals were staying.

Chief Jailor Karunaratne said, when he ran to the YOB, he heard the attackers banging the cell rooms on the ground floor and shouting that they wanted to kill the Tamils. The 28 Tamil prisoners were locked inside the cells. Some cells contained only one prisoner, others three. Karunaratne said he also heard the group that went to the first floor threatening to kill the Tamils.

Survivor's Account

We have on record accounts of the events provided by the survivors, of the happenings in the ground floor and in the first floor. The Tamil monthly magazine *Amuthu*, published by Lake House in the closing years of the 'nineties,' printed an investigative report about the prison massacre in its issue of July 1999. The report concentrates on the events that happened on the ground floor.

The report says that dinner was served as usual at 4 p.m. It says the Tamil prisoners anticipated an attack any time. They prepared to resist the attack. They made weapons out of the plates and tin cups. They also stored gravy and curries. Their plan was to throw the curries on the face of the attackers and delay the attack, giving sufficient time for the police or the army to intervene.

Amuthu interviewed a survivor. This is the translation of the Tamil report:

"In the evening we saw a crowd running towards the building in which we were locked. They made the same kind of banging noise as on Monday. They banged the gates and the walls with the weapons they carried. They shouted that they wanted to drink the blood of the Tigers. I pressed my face against the cell bars and peeped. I identified the person leading the crowd. He was Sepala Ekanayake, the person who hijacked a plane. I noticed that the man who came with him had a bunch of keys.

"Our cells were locked with padlocks. The man with the bunch of keys tried to open the padlock of our cell. Behind him were people with axes, long jungle knives, pounding poles, rice ladles and pointed iron rods. Thuraiarah, who was with us in our cell, stood ready to throw the gravy and the curries. We asked him to throw. In his excitement, he threw the entire lot of curries in one fling. The man who got the curry on his face retreated. Another man came forward and hit the padlock with the back of an axe. It broke.

The door opens into the passage. The attackers tried to pull it open. We pulled it towards us thus preventing it from opening. They then started hitting at our fingers holding the cell bars. We could not hold on any longer. Then we used the bed sheets to pull the door. They cut them too. Then they pulled open the door and two attackers entered our cell.

They rained blows on Thuraiarah. They cut him with the jungle knife. He fell dead. I hit them with my hands and legs. One of them swung the axe at me. I dodged. But I received a cut on my head. I caught him tight and retreated to a corner. I held him as my shield. The other attacker tried to advance to catch me. I tried to hit him with my leg. Someone standing behind him gave a thundering blow on my leg. It was painful. I could not stand any longer. I slumped. They hit me all over the body. I feigned death. They gave some more blows.

Then something happened. They started running away. I saw soldiers wearing gas masks coming in. I heard someone talking in Tamil. I shouted, "I am alive. Save me." Douglas Devananda came to me. With him were Manikathan, Alagiri, Subramaniam and Farook. They carried me and placed me in the visitor's lobby. There I saw the bodies of Dr. Rajasundaram and Mariampillai. The head of Mariampillai was crushed. They brought and placed Thevakumar beside me.

Prisons Superintendent came there. I told him that I am losing blood. He asked me whether I could walk. I impulsively said, 'Yes.'

Some prisoners who were helping the authorities to carry the dead to the lobby saw me speaking. I heard them saying to each other that I should be silenced.

I shouted, "Sir, Sir."

An army officer came. I told him, "If you keep me here they will kill me. Please take me to hospital."

Thevakumar and I were taken to the hospital in a truck.

At the hospital, the doctor ordered that I be x-rayed. The staff did not x-ray me. They said there is a staff shortage. I was simply left there. People came to look at me out of curiosity. Some called me *Kotiya* (Tiger) and some others spat on me. A nurse came near me. I held her hand and told her in Sinhalese, 'You must save me.' She came with a bottle of saline but there was no stand to hold it. I held the bottle up. Another nurse came and pulled the bottle and the tube. The first nurse scolded her and reconnected the saline.

We were taken to a female ward and a lady doctor stitched me up. We were then taken to the male ward. Thevakumar did not regain consciousness, He was making an unusual noise. One of my legs was chained to our bed. I later learnt that Thevakumar had died. The following day the magistrate recorded my testimony.

The Failed Plea

The group that ran upstairs also banged their weapons on the walls and doors and announced their entry. They also shouted threatening warnings. They said they wanted to drink their blood. They said they wanted to eat their flesh.

"All was quiet on the 26th. On the 27th at 2:30 pm there was shouting around Youth Ward and armed prisoners scaled boundary walls and started to break open gates in the Youth Ward. Nearly 40 prisoners armed with axes, swords, crowbars, iron pipes and wooden legs appeared before our door and started to break the lock," wrote A. David, an architect and co-founder of the Gandhian Movement. David, who lives in India, has written his story several times and it has been printed in several publications.

He had written about the bare bones, the structure, of the incident. I will add flesh to his story. This interesting piece was provided to me by a Tamil journalist friend who moved with Nithyanathan and David when they were with the LTTE in 1984, soon after their escape from the Batticaloa prison.

"From the moment we realized that we are going to be attacked, we decided to resist. Dr. Rajasundaram opposed it. "We are Gandhians," he said. "We should tackle the problem the Gandhian way." He gave another reason also. "How can we resist such a large crowd?" he asked. Others disagreed. Dr. Tharmalingam disagreed with him violently. He forcefully retorted, "They are killers. They are coming to kill us. If you go and talk Gandhian to them, they will kill you. We are not going to sacrifice our lives like that. We will rather fight and die."

Dr. Tharmalingam then was over 70 years old.

Dr. Rajasundaram fell silent. He was planning his strategy while the remaining eight made preparations to resist. They

broke the tables and chairs and took the legs in their hands. They got ready to hit back.

The violent crowd of about 40 prisoners armed with axes, crowbars, iron rods and logs of wood broke the padlock by hitting it with an axe and opened the door to the passage. Seeing the Tamil prisoners ready to hit back, the attackers were taken aback. They hesitated and stood outside the entrance. The Tamil prisoners stood a few meters away. Their strategy was to hit the attackers when they advanced towards them.

Dr. Rajasuntharan made use of this pause. He went forward. He stretched out his right hand signifying that he wanted to shake hands with them. They did not respond.

"My friends," Dr. Rajasuntharam addressed them. "There is no need for us to fight each other. There is no need to kill each other. I am a follower of Mahathma Gandhi. I believe in non-violence. I have not harmed any living being. We are not involved in any robberies and murders. Please spare us." He appealed to the human feeling in them.

Noticing their reluctance to advance he appealed to their religious feeling. He told them that he was a Hindu and does not believe in violence and as Buddhists they should not kill.

One of the attackers stepped forward, and pulled him out and another hit on his head with an iron rod. He fell among the attackers and died. The Tamil prisoners immediately advanced to the entrance and put their defence plan into operation. The young men, Nithiananthan, Kovai Mahesan and Dr. Jayakularajah stood in the forward line. Rev. Jayathilakarajah, David and Rev. Fr. Sinnarasa formed the second line of defence. The oldest of the group, Dr. V. Tharmalingam, took up the back position.

Then where is the eighth man?

Dr. Tharmalingam used to answer this question with mirth: "He got to a side and started praying."

The attackers were taken aback when they saw the hostile posture of the Tamil prisoners. They retreated a few steps and tried to hit the defenders with the wooden poles and iron bars. The defenders warded off the blows with the legs of tables and chairs they had. Dr. Tharmalingam recalled with amusement the hitting match that went on for a few minutes.

Then a blow fell on the shoulder of Kovai Mahesan. He lost balance, trembled and fell. "I pushed someone from the second line to the front. Then I shouted at Kovai to get up. He sprang up. Then another fell out of exhaustion. The breach was filled and I made the fallen person to jump up," Dr. Tharmalingam recalled.

Former Jaffna Member of Parliament V. Yogeswaran told me that his uncle, Dr. V. Tharmalingam, had re-enacted the scene to them at a family gathering in England which he concluded with the comment, "We survived because we hit back."

Six young men and an old man kept scores of attackers at bay for nearly half an hour.

Major Peiris and his commandos reached Welikade Prison within half an hour. Peiris and his men left their vehicles near the Chapel Section and ran to the YO. Peiris saw Sepala Ekanayake standing close to the YO. He had completed the ground floor attack and had come out.

He asked Major Peiris, "*Sir komade veda?*" (Sir, how is the job?). Peiris, who had a gun in one hand, punched Sepala with the other. He fell flat on his back. Peiris and his men donned the gas masks and fired tear gas. The attackers ran away.

For the details of what happened after the arrival of the commandos, we quote from the article David wrote in *Tamil Times* of November 1983:

"We managed to keep the crowd at bay for half an hour. The army arrived and with tear gas dispersed the crowd. Then two soldiers lined us up and were taking aim to shoot when the Commander called out from below to them to come down. Then the soldiers chased us down and all who escaped death were lined up on the footpath in front of the Youth Ward. As we walked out, we saw corpses of our colleagues around us and we heard prisoners shouting that it was a pity we were allowed to live.

We were ordered to run into a mini-van and removed out of the prison compound and loaded into an army truck. We were ordered to lie face down on the floor of the truck and a few who raised their heads were trampled down by the soldiers. All along the way to Katunayake Airport some soldiers kept cursing the Tamils and Eelam, using obscene language. We were kept at the airport until early morning. We were refused even water. We were then taken into an Air Force plane, ordered to sit with our heads down until we reached Batticaloa Airport. From there we were taken in an open van to Batticaloa prison. We felt we had returned to sanity and some measure of safety."

In this case also, an inquest was held. The magistrate entered a verdict of homicide due to riot and directed the Borella police to conduct further investigations and produce the suspects before him. The bodies of the 18 slain Tamil prisoners were burnt at Kanatte.

Jayewardene met with Ven. Elle Gunawansa that afternoon. The monk told Jayewardene that the Sinhala people were angry and he should speak to them over the radio and the television and pacify them. He also advised the President to ban the TULF and step up the military campaign against the Tigers,

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Chapter 6. Indira's Telephone Call

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