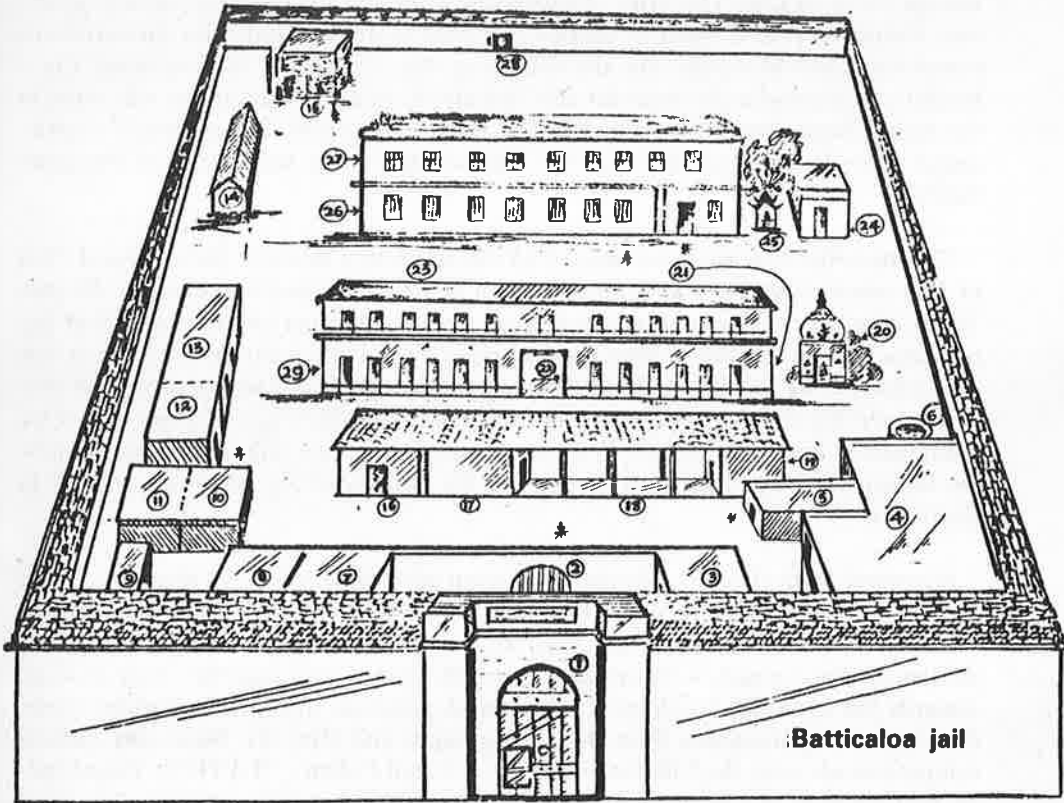


BATTICOLOA JAIL BREAK!



Batticaloa jail

**People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil
Eelam's *Daring Mission!***

**PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ORGANIZATION
OF TAMIL EELAM (PLOT)**

This Account was given by Mr. G. GNANASEGARAM, and approved as factually correct by Mr. S. A. DAVID, the President of GANDHIYAM:

A terrible racial riot engulfed the whole of Sri Lanka in the wake of the Killing of thirteen Sinhalese soldiers in Tinnevely on the 23rd of July. Fifty three freedom fighters, who were imprisoned in Welikada, were brutally massacred in order to avenge these deaths. The army, higher officers of the Prison Department, jailers and Sinhalese prison inmates carried out this mortal assault with Government connivance and blessings! On the following day, 28th July, the eighteen Tamil freedom fighters who survived this criminal attack, and eighteen others who were in the nearby Magazine Jail were airlifted to Batticoloa prison. These thirty six "prisoners" were kept in the "F" and "G" high security wings which were in the same building.

The atrocities that were committed on the brave fifty three on the 25th and 27th of July would have been perpetrated upon us too if we had remained in the jail. These attacks were carried out with Government approval to the extent that not one assailant was arrested, even on suspicion! Such state-controlled terrorism was unleashed on the Tamil population at large and especially on the imprisoned liberation youth! We felt certain that one day we too would have to give up our lives if we continued to remain in prison. With the Welikada incident still fresh in our minds, we began planning a method of escape, the very next day after we arrived in Batticoloa.

Gnanasekaram (Rajan), Manickam Thasan and Vamadevan, all members of the Peoples Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOT), had a meeting with the President of the Gandhiyam Society, Mr. S. A. David (an architect). Under his guidance, these youth were allocated specific tasks, and together they worked towards the eventual freedom of all political prisoners in the jail. Besides these, Professor Nithyananthan, Rev. Jeyathilagarajah and Rev. Fr. Sinnarasa (whose sympathies are with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam – "LTTE"), Thambipillai Maheswaran and Devananthan all spoke to their respective groups about this matter.

Sixteen members of PLOT were killed in Welikada jail, and this proved a great loss to the movement. Thus the rescue of the surviving PLOT members was of paramount importance to our group. Each group undertook a certain degree of responsibility towards freeing all those imprisoned. However, individual plans delayed the collective effort. Accordingly, Mr. David called the leaders of each group and questioned each about what his group had decided on, concerning the breakout. He then advised all the groups to unite, and carry out certain tasks for the greater good of all. Using his personal skill as an architect, Mr. David had drawn up an accurate plan of the jail. With this plan as a guide, he spelt out what each of us had to do.

Our first action now was to contact PLOT members outside, with news of our planned escape. First of all PLOT members were appointed to monitor the day to day routine of the security guards. 'F' wing is on the top storey of the block, and is shaped like a marquee; within it are housed the bathroom and lavatories. From the relative vantage point of this lavatory window, it was possible to watch and make note of all the movements of the armed guards. Over a period of six weeks, PLOT boys continuously took it in turns every two hours to monitor the successive changes of the security forces. We found that there were always eleven guards on duty, and that at 8.30p.m. a new crew of eleven replaced their associates. With these eleven there also came two armed guards – the lynchpin of their security measures.

Another complication to our plan arose on the 7th of September when another PLOT member was transferred to our prison from the Army Hospital in Colombo with severe injuries inflicted by the Sri Lankan Air Force. Such were his injuries, that he was unable to walk, and so we had to make special arrangements to have him carried all the way to freedom.

The prison is situated on an island, and thus we were surrounded by water. From the prison, there are two possible land routes to the water's edge. The island is linked to the mainland by two bridges – one near the prison, and the other more distant. Beside the nearer bridge was the Police Station, and close to the Second was an Air Force Camp. Should the Jail Authorities send a message to the Police Station, both bridges would have been blocked, and our means of escape cut off. The jail was also very heavily protected – there was an Army Camp a mere one and a half miles from the prison, the Police Station a half mile away and the Air Force Camp a further quarter of a mile distant. Thus, the longer we could travel without being seen, the better would be our chances of escaping the terrors of the Sri Lankan Armed Forces.

Two hundred yards to the rear of the prison was a canal through which the ocean which lapped the shores of the Eastern Province could be approached. In accordance, we sent word to PLOT headquarters, requesting our members to make arrangements to assist us getting to the Indian Ocean by this route. Our PLOT comrades outside tried out boats in this canal to ensure there was sufficient depth of water, to safely allow our vessels to sail. However, the canal proved too shallow near the land, and so this route our PLOT comrades outside tried out boats in this canal to ensure there was sufficient depth of water, to safely allow our vessels to sail. However, the canal proved too shallow near the land, and so this route was abandoned, and alternative plans were immediately drawn up, to make an overland escape. But, to reach Jaffna (and safety) by land meant that we would have to pass fourteen Police Stations and seven Army Camps! Therefore, it was decided, that this was too risky a proposition. Finally, we agreed that we should travel to the beach in some sort of vehicle, and thereafter by speedboat to Trincomalee; taking this particular route meant passing only one Police Station – the one in Batticaloa.

With this plan in view, arrangements were made both within and without the jail. Manickam Thasan took on the responsibility within the prison to watch the movements of the Army, Police and jailers on the actual day of the escape. We obtained a large map of the surrounding countryside, several compasses and simple first aid equipment from the PLOT members outside; the first aid medicines were needed in case any fellow inmates sustained injuries during the escape. We had arranged that, once they left jail, each group would be looked after by the members of their own group, who were outside. Mr. David set a deadline by which time all the groups had to submit news of their outside arrangements; accordingly on the 18th of September, all the leaders assembled and disclosed their respective strategies. Dr. Nithyanathan (of LTTE) stated that he was unable to obtain any information from his group outside, and asked our group to include them in our plan of escape. Devananthan, who says he belongs to the Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), said, that although he had contacted his group, he too had not heard anything from them concerning assistance outside the prison; he therefore wanted to join PLOT. Mr. T. Maheswaran announced that his group outside would take care of him and his three colleagues, once they had got out.

In accordance with our earlier instructions, a van and three speedboats were already brought into Batticaloa to transport us first to the beach and then to Trincomalee. The week after we moved to Batticaloa we informed our PLOT colleagues outside that they should make plans to be ready for our escape by the 21st of September. Only two members from our group within the jail, knew of this deadline. Accordingly, on the 21st, at about 2pm we heard that all arrangements had been completed. This message was communicated to Mr. David, and with his architect's plan of the jail buildings, we made serious plans to break out of the jail. The LTTE then said that they would only come with us until we got out of the jail, and that thereafter, they would make their own way by foot. T. Maheswaran and party said, as before, that their group members were already in Batticaloa, waiting for their arrival. Devananthan reiterated that he had not got any reply from his group. Whatever the conditions or circumstances, we were determined to break out of jail on the 23rd September, as we had wind that the prison authorities were notified to bring some of us to Colombo to appear in a case on the 26th of September. According to this report, Gnanasekaram (Rajan), Sritharan, Manickam Thasan, Babuji, Ganeshalingam, Bhavananthan and Mahendran of PLOT and Thedchanamoorthy were to be taken away with an army escort at 6.30a.m. on Sunday 25th of September, to Colombo. When we heard of these preparations, we resolved, that whatever the consequences, we had to escape before the 25th of September.

This was made known to the PLOT members outside. Non-members of PLOT were not informed of this decision. During this period, the Government had authorised the Army to perform another duty – that of providing Army protection at the centres where G.C.E. 'A' Level examinations were to be held. This duty was concurrent from September 19th for three weeks. That part of the army whose prime concern up to now had been the guarding of the Tamil prisoners was now ordered to patrol the examination centres; we therefore, determined not to miss this golden opportunity. Since no examinations were to be held at weekends, we had to make our move during the week, as the Army presence would obviously be less strong at that time.

There is a Pillaiyar Temple in the vicinity of the prison. Every Friday, when poojas were offered between 6 and 9 p.m., sacred hymns were sung over the Public Address system. If any commotion arose during that time, there was little chance of it being detected outside the walls of the prison. This was an important consideration. We now had to decide the exact hour of the break-out; several times were suggested – 2, 5 or 9 a.m., midday, 1, 4, 7 or 11 p.m. Of these, 7 p.m. seemed the most suitable, and we notified our PLOT colleagues outside about our final plans. The EPRLF met PLOT and explained that they had no vehicles to transport their colleagues in prison, and they requested PLOT to take EPRLF members with them. This was communicated to us inside. We felt that as Tamils, the differences of our organisations should be forgotten, and that our objective should be to liberate all our colleagues in prison. Hence we were willing to take the EPRLF boys with us, and we made this decision known to our PLOT comrades outside. Earlier, we had organised one van and three boats, but as these now proved inadequate to transport the additional EPRLF boys, plot had to bring an additional van and boat to Batticoloa. They sent word that the necessary arms and equipment for the actual task of escaping had been brought to Pulianthivu.

When Mr. David heard this, he called all of us – including Prof. Nithyananthan – Rev. Jeyathilagarajah, T. Maheswaran and Devananthan, and disclosed the exact time of escape and the precautionary measures arranged for us once we had got out; he then drew up the final plans. Once the period between 7 and 8 p.m. was accepted, Mr. David then formulated the details. Then, using the plan he had drawn up, we planned how to get past the main entrance once we had left our wings. If for some reason we were prevented from using the doors of our wings, we hoped to climb out of the windows.

We had always feared that the Army or the Sinhalese prisoners could stage a repeat performance of what happened at Welikada. We were also certain that the jailers would never help us escape such an attack by, for example, opening the doors for us. Therefore, we had to devise our own methods of escape and defence. With this in mind, shortly after arriving in Batticaloa Jail, we had sawn off the window bars of our cells and then camouflaged our deed. Five boys were chosen to overpower the two sentries at the main entrance – they were Gnanasekaram, Manickam Thasan, Bhavananthan and T. Maheswaran (of PLOT) and Devananthan of (EPRLF).

There are two doors at the entrance, the inner one being ironbarred. The distance between the two doors is about 12 feet and there are two guards normally within this area. We needed five boys because three were needed to hold the jailers at gun point; the other two opened the doors. Next we picked Vasudevan and Thadchanamoorthy (of PLOT) to overcome the jailer in the office. There were still eight other jailers besides these three. Of these eight, three were in our building and the other five were on duty on other parts of the compound. The boys who were assigned to open the doors were told that if they encountered any officers on their way, they were to apprehend them and hand them over to the group which followed them. This group was to consist of Prof. Nithyananthan, Dr. Jeyakularajah, Rev. Fr. Sinnarasa (LTTE) and Babuji, Gnanavel and Sritharam (of the PLOT). They were to plaster over the mouths and bind the hands and feet of any officers submitted to them. Rev. Jeyathilagarajah and T. Maheswaran, with his companion Subramariam, were in charge of opening the cells of the fourteen inmates who were in the floor below us.

Devananthan was given the sole task of opening Mrs. Nirmala Nithyananthan's cell and leading her out; Gnanasekaram and Bhavananthan had to carry Ramanathan, who was in the sick bay with gunshot wounds.

Most of the major tasks within the jail were undertaken and executed by PLOT. Members themselves. Outside the prison, transportation was also organised by PLOT once we got out of the prison, it was PLOT members who led us to Trincomalee; the eighteen EPRLF members separated from us and went their own way from Trincomalee.

This jail breakout was master-minded by PLOT. Thambipillai Maheswaran and Rev. Jeyathilagarajah also helped immensely. Rev. Jeyathilagarajah and Subramamiam were the two who opened the doors for the EPRLF boys – but all that they then did was to bundle their clothes and belongings and run to take seats in the vans. Such are the heroes who used our vans and boats and now claim the credit for this operation which was actually planned and carried out by PLOT! Not only is such a suggestion highly amusing, but also patently false! It is sheer madness on the part of these EPRLF members to proclaim that they were responsible for the breakout when they neither knew how the outside operational plans were prepared and executed, nor whose vans and boats were used for transportation, nor which group – (PLOT) conducted to safety, those who left at Panichchankeny.

We now deeply regret that Mr. David ever co-operated with a person like Devananthan.

Until now we have not contradicted any statement made by the EPRLF. We will confront these groups who have issued such falacious statements in due course.

The real truth of the jail break from Batticaloa jail, will be published as a serial in “Makkal Pathai”, a monthly magazine printed in Madras. The extent of the participation of every organisation and individual is very clearly explained in that magazine.



**EVER ONWARDS TO VICTORY:
THE PLOT SHOWS THE WAY
FORWARD**

KEY TO THE PLAN OF BATTICOLOA JAIL

1. Main Gate
2. Iron Gate
3. Guards' Room
4. Women's Wing (Nirmala Nithyananthan)
5. Prison Office
6. Well
7. Visitor's Waiting Room
8. Visitor's Reception Room (To meet prisoners)
9. Officers' Toilet
10. O.P.D.
11. Sick Bay
12. Barber Saloon
13. Store Room
14. Prisoners' Toilets
15. Water Trough
16. Room where lawyers meet prisoners
17. Officers' Rest Room
18. Hall
19. R. C. Wing
20. Pillaiyar Temple
21. Remand Prisoner's Cells
22. Staircase leading to C wing
23. C wing
24. Kitchen
25. Buddhist Temple
26. G wing
27. F wing
28. Iron barred window (from which jailers observe surroundings)
29. Wing for convicted non-political prisoners.

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