

Meenambakkam Airport Bomb Blast

8 One of the first serious fallout of the militant activities of Sri Lankan Tamil militants in India was a bomb blast at Meenambakkam Airport at Madras. This incident starkly brought to light the fact that due to militant activities of Sri Lankan Tamil groups, there was a grave danger to the lives of the Indian public themselves though they were, till then, not a target of these groups. As per the affidavit of M. Karunanidhi no. 187/94- JCI, "There was a bomb blast at the Madras International Airport on the 3rd. August 1984 in which over 30 persons were killed and several others were injured. There was an estimated damage to the Airport of over Rs. 50 lakhs".

This incident has been described in details by Shri K. Mohandas in his affidavit no. 64/92-JCI as follows :-

Para 22 " My worst fears were confirmed when there was a major bomb blast in the Madras Airport on the night of August 2, 1984 which killed 30 persons. There was a disinformation campaign, including planted stories in obliging newspapers to the effect that the blast was the work of Mossad, the Israeli Intelligence agency, with a view to discrediting the Tamil militants at the behest of Sri Lankan Government. The story was put into my ears even officially."

Para 23. :- "But the Crime Branch/ CID sleuths, working overtime under my direction, detected the case within a week. The investigation revealed the involvement of a small group called TEA (Tamil Ealam Army). Involved in the conspiracy were: (1) the TEA Chief "Panegoda" Maheswaran (so called because of his daring escape from the maximum security prison at Panegoda in Sri Lanka) who was a chemical engineering graduate from London University and an expert in explosives (who, according to a section of the press, was reported to have visited Madras prior to the Rajiv Gandhi assassination). (2) Vigneswara Raja, retired Collector of Customs in Sri Lanka; (3) Thambi Raja, a Sri Lankan national; (4) Vijayakumar, and (5) Loganathan, both Indian nationals working for Air Lanka; and (6) Chandrakumar, a police constable attached to the Airport police station. The objective of the conspirators was not to blast Madras airport, but to plant a bomb on the Air Lanka plane leaving Madras for Colombo, with the timing so adjusted as to have the bomb explode in Colombo airport. The plan misfired because of the delay in the take off of the Air Lanka aircraft. Vigneswara Raja, Thambi Raja, Vijayakumar, Loganathan and Chandrakumar were arrested immediately, while Maheswaran absconded."

PARA 24."From a suburban house in Madras a similar timing device was seized apart from 100 kg of gelatine sticks, detonator wires, chemicals like red phosphorous and sodium metal, crystal capacitors, 1 kg of potassium cyanide and currency worth Rs. 2 lakhs (both Indian and Foreign). It was apparent that

the time-bomb used at the air- port was manufactured in this house, and this was corroborated by the arrested Sri Lankan nationals."

8.1 From the investigation records of the case, which was investigated by the Crime Branch CID of the Tamil Nadu Police in Cr. No. 53/84 and chargesheeted under sections 120(b), 302, 436,301 r/w sec. 114 IPC and u/Ss 4 and 5 r/w sec. 6 of the Explosives Substances Act and Section 12(b) of Indian Passport Act the following facts have emerged :-

On 2.8.84 at about 2250 hrs. there was a powerful bomb blast at the Meenambakkam airport, which caused the death of 30 persons who were at the airport, injured several and caused extensive damage worth Rs.50 lakhs. A case was registered in this connection by the Crime Branch, CID as Cr.No.53/84 under sec. 120-B,302, 436, 301 r/w. Sec. 144, IPC and under sec. 4 & 5 r/w. 6 of Explosive substances Act and under sec. 12(b) of Indian passport Act. During the investigation conducted in this case, 11 accused including Sri Lankan Tamil militants were found involved. Investigations further disclosed that these accused had hatched a conspiracy with the motive of causing bomb blast at the Colombo airport as a retaliation for the anti-Tamil riots in Sri Lanka. However, their plan of transporting the bombs to Colombo by an Air Lanka flight could not succeed and the bomb, instead, exploded at the Meenambakkam airport.

The main accused of the case was a Sri Lankan Tamil Kadiresan (A-6) who alongwith Thambiraja (A-7) and Sri (A-8) (both Sri Lankan Tamils) alongwith Ramu (A.10) and Dhandapani (A.10) entered into a criminal conspiracy during the period February to July, 1984 to cause bomb blast at Colombo to cause harm to the Sri Lankan Army as a retaliatory act to the excesses caused by the Sri Lankan Army to the Tamil civilians of Northern Sri Lanka. During the course of the conspiracy, the accused purchased explosives in the form of gelatine from Palayamkottai. The gelatine was purchased from National Trading company on three occasions during March to July, 1984. The accused had also purchased detonators from the same shop. the shop was a licensed explosive shop which sold explosives to quarry contractors. The accused had stored the explosives in a house at Anna Nagar, Madras. Investigations further disclosed that the accused Kadiresan had initially attempted to board an Air Lanka Flight from Madras to Colombo on 31.7.84 alongwith two suit cases filled with explosives and improvised as a time bomb. However, on 31.7.84 at about 6 P.M. when Kadiresan got the suitcases weighed at the checking counter, the weight was found to be in excess by 35 Kgs. Since he did not have money to pay the extra charges, he cancelled the ticket and came back with the two suitcases. On 2.8.84 at about 6 p.m., the accused again went to the Meenambakkam airport, this time to board the Air Lanka flight UL 122 to Colombo. This time the accused Kadiresan got the baggage checked in and paid excess baggage fare. Each of the two boxes filled with explosives weighed 55 kgs. To misguide the investigators, Kadiresan got his name changed in the passenger manifest from Kadiresan to Jadiresan. The two boxes were sent to the Customs hall for

checking. Since Kadiresan did not come forward to get the suitcases checked, the flight left without the accused as well as the boxes. The accused went away from the airport leaving the suitcases abandoned in the Customs hall. Realizing that the time bomb will explode at the airport, the accused made anonymous call at about 2210 hrs. to the Security manager that the bombs were kept in the two boxes. Another call was given by the accused at 2245 hrs. However, while the two boxes were in the process of being removed, they exploded at 2250 hrs.

At the time of laying the chargesheet, A.10 Ramu and A.11 Dhandapani were taken as approvers. A.6 Kadiresan, A.7 Thambiraja, A.8 Sri and A.9 Vigneswararaja were absconding. The case was splitted against them. A.1 Saravanabaran, A.2 Chandrakumar, A.3 Loganathan, A.4 Vijayakumar and A.5 Balasubramaniam were convicted and sentenced.

8.2 As per affidavit No.187/94 of Shri M.Karunanidhi, "There was a bomb blast at the Madras International Airport on the 3rd of August 1984 in which over 30 persons were killed and several others were injured. There was an estimated damage to the airport of over Rs.50 lakhs. Sri Lankan Tamil militants were arrested in connection with this bomb blast incident. I submit one Thiru Killivalavan who is now a secretary of the Tamilnadu Congress Committee(I) stood as surety for one of the accused in the airport bomb blast case."

8.3 The four absconders could not be arrested even subsequently and continue to remain at large even though some leads are available regarding the whereabouts of two of them. The information furnished on them by an Intelligence Agency indicates as follows :-

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(Register No. 155, Secretary (R))

"i) Vigneshwar Raja, an ex officer of Sri Lankan Customs was accused No. 7 in a case registered in connection with the blast at Meenambakkam Airport on August 2, 1984 in which 30 persons were killed. He subsequently jumped bail and is at present running a one man organisation called the National Council for Protection of Sri Lankan Refugees at 49, Cambridge Road, Morsely, Birmingham, B-13 9 UE. His telephone numbers are 021-444-5393 and 021-443-2009.

ii) Panagoda Maheswaran, alias Thambipillai Maheswaran, alias Kadiresan, was accused no. 1 in the Meenambakkam Airport bomb blast case. He also jumped bail and absconded from Tamil Nadu. He was believed to have returned to U.K. where he was studying earlier. Enquiries indicate that he is not in U.K., at present and is believed to be either in Canada or in India with an assumed name. Panagoda Maheswaran is highly secretive and doesn't share even his telephone number or address with anyone, including his closest friends.

iii) Panagoda Maheswaran was the founder of "Tamil Eelam Army", which had a very negligible following. After the crackdown on it in the wake of the blast at the Meenambakkam Airport, it had thinned down and finally faded away in India."