

# **Sri Lanka: Real heroes and conspiracy theories behind riots within high walls**

Tuesday 14 February 2012, by [KARUNARATNE Vickramabahu \("Bahu"\)](#) (Date first published: 5 February 2012).

We were told that four prison officers and ten men on remand over drug related offences have so far been identified by the intelligence units, as having been behind the recent riot in the Borella Magazine prison.

Police officials say that three prison officers had been seen encouraging the rioters. It is claimed that alleged drug traffickers, identified among those who led this revolt inside the prison, are Anthony Raj, Mohamed Shiran, Malik alias Kondaya, Army Thushara, Dematagoda Raja, Cake Saman, Kaduwela Sudda and Kamal Nishantha.

## **Plan to break a wall**

Apparently, there had also been a plan to break the back wall of the prison and allow over 200 persons who were on remand over drug related offences to escape.

The Commissioner General of Prisons P .W. Kodippily has said that the detainees would never have resorted to such acts without the support of the officers. Twenty remand prisoners were injured due to gunfire, when prison guards took stern measures to bring the situation under control. Four prison guards had also been injured in the clashes.

The tense situation began, following a protest by the remand prisoners calling for the immediate removal of a new prison superintendent Emil Ranjan, who was recently appointed to the Magazine prison from the Kalutara prison. The inmates had protested against the strict measures implemented by the new superintendent. Emil had been working as a subordinate officer at Magazine before he went to Kalutara as the officer in charge.

The Special Task Force (STF) and the Army were also called in to assist the prison officers to control the unrest. During the clash 180 LTTE suspects who were placed in a ward within the Magazine Prison were moved to the Welikada Prison. Though there is no emergency declared, government is apparently empowered by the PTA, to bring out army and the STF to control a civil unrest within the prison walls.

Opposition MPs have pointed out, that the President had declared in the budget speech that the Magazine and Welikada prison complex should be moved out of Colombo. One obvious reason is the large extent of land adjacent to Baseline road is very valuable and can be utilized for the mega development schemes of the government. Global economic powers most certainly will approve of such projects. Is this a part of the conspiracy that the government mentioned here and there?

## **Political prisoners**

At the beginning of January, I got a message from political prisoner Sharma that there is to be a change in the administration, in the magazine prison. He was disturbed that the concessions they have won, by our intervention would be removed, and they will be put back with prisoners suspected of other criminal offences.

The Movement for Political Prisoners intervened continuously, to get many concessions for political prisoners from the earlier administration. Both LTTE and SINHALA KOTI suspects who had to undergo brutal treatment were given some peace of mind and they were unofficially considered to be political prisoners. Many were bailed out, using the option of fundamental rights cases.

Sharma is a Hindu priest who had to undergo humiliation and contempt; he expected a riot engineered by the state as a stepping stone for removing them from Magazine to a place like the Kalutara prison. Kalutara prison is relatively inaccessible for visitors and is reputed to be a place of ill-treatment for political prisoners. I hear that the plan is to send these political prisoners to Kalutara.

Finally what Sharma told me has come true, in spite of my efforts to forewarn about a commotion. Sharma and his wife are kept without any trial for over ten years. They may have to suffer another dark stretch with endless harassment. Emil Ranjan may be a strict disciplinarian and an honest administrator. But he is only serving a chauvinist regime maintained by myths and state terror.

He reminds me of, Inspector Javert who was an adjutant guard at the Bagne of Toulon during Val Jean's incarceration of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*. It was a story placed at the time of the struggle for democracy in France. Javert was loyal to the laws of the reactionary regime of the bourgeoisie left behind by Napoleon Bonaparte.

Loyalty of disciplinarian Emil Ranjan may bring the same crisis of conscience faced by Inspector Javert. Those who break the law for humanitarian treatment of accused could become the real heroes of the history.

**Dr Vickramabahu**

---