

**'Military intelligence officers tortured me'**  
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EXCLUSIVE A solitary bulb hangs from the ceiling, barely lighting the blackened walls of the cell that trap him like a rat.

In the tiny, windowless room, he battles madness from within and relentless chill from without.

He has lost all sense of time, of how long he has been left to freeze in this hole, how long he has gone without sleep.

A loud rap or a kick against the door ensures he is kept on the brink of consciousness and reason.

Ironically, he holds on to his fragile sanity by virtue of the physical pain visited upon him by the man whom, to the victim, has come to embody fear itself.

Fear runs down his spine with every blood-curdling scream he hears from beyond his confines, every sickening thud that echoes through the walls. It's only a matter of time before 'he' comes back for more

A year has passed, but N Tharmendran, 42, can vividly recount every detail of the internal military investigation that he claims he was subjected to, as if it was just yesterday.

Tharmendran, a former RMAF sergeant who has been charged over the theft of two jet-fighter engines, claimed he was detained and tortured by military intelligence for three weeks in connection with the case.

Tharmendran alleged that the favourite method of his interrogators - allegedly led by a major and his assistant, also a major - was to make him wear a crash helmet and repeatedly hit him as hard as possible.

"They used a golf stick and something long like a cricket bat. The reason is that when you hit me with a helmet (on), there's no mark. You can't find any mark, but the pain is internal pain," he told Malaysiakini.

"That's what Major (name withheld) told me. (He said) 'I can hit you how hard I want, but there won't be any mark. Even (if) you go to the doctor he will say you only have (a) headache'."

And because of the physical abuse, Tharmendran said he suffered severe pain in his neck and shoulders and was barely move his left arm for a few days after the interrogation ended.

He also claimed that he was repeatedly stripped to his underwear, made to stand on a block of ice for up to an hour at a time, and threatened with death.

"I was told by this major, he has friends in the UTK (special forces) and KDN (Home Ministry) and it won't take him much time to get some men to shoot and kill me.

"Another thing he said was that nobody would believe me (if I report the torture), because he is the IO (investigating officer) and he has the authority. He said that, even if I go to the hospital and say I was being tortured by these people, he said nobody would believe me."

Tharmendran said he was not allowed to contact anyone to inform them of his whereabouts during the three weeks of his detention.

His father N Nagarajah filed a police report last month to report Tharmendran's alleged torture while under military detention.

'Lost pride, dignity'

Tharmendran said he lost 20kg after being tortured and during the six months he was detained in the Sg Buloh Prison for not being able to post the initial bail of RM150,000 in connection with the charge.

He believes he is not the only one being tortured by the intelligence officers, claiming at least 30 others were also experiencing the same ordeal for reasons unknown to him. He does not know what has happened to them.

Tharmendran said he is grateful for his release on reduced bail of RM50,000, but that adjusting to life after six months of detention is hard.

azlan "I've lost my dignity, my pride... I'm very, very embarrassed to face the public because it's been (publicised) that I am the one who was involved in the theft of the engine(s), but actually I am not the one," he said.

He expressed his gratitude to prison officers and warders who had taken care of him and helped him with his problems.

Now that he is back in society, Tharmendran said he needs to pick himself up and deal with the debt facing his family, who had to borrow money to post bail.

"They (his family) were very happy to see me, but now I have to look for a job. I'm jobless now, and it doesn't matter what (kind of work)... I can do anything," he said soberly.

"As long as I can get a job... I need to pay back whatever money my family borrowed. My mom's jewellery has all been pawned and it's not fair to my relatives."

Tharmendran said he feels most for his daughter, who deserves an explanation for his absence.

NONE "I have to go and see my daughter, but I don't know how I am going to face (her). She's 12 years old. I'm divorced so she's living with my ex-wife in Ipoh," he said.

"I saw her last November during the school holidays. I used to get her for the holidays and she'll be with my mom for three weeks... I need to do a lot of explaining to her."

Tharmendran has been charged with company director Rajandran Prasad Kusy over the theft of two F-5E engines at the air movement section of the Subang air force base in December 2007.

If found guilty on charge under Section 380 of the Penal Code, he faces up to 10 years in

jail and whipping.

He faces another charge of abetment under Section 109 of the Penal Code for allegedly collaborating with senior airman Mohamad Shukri Mohamad Yusop to steal the engines from the Sungai Besi air force base.

Mohamad Shukri was not charged with the theft and is likely to be one of the main prosecution witnesses.

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