

**REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF  
INQUIRY ON THE ESCAPE OF  
JEMAAH ISLAMIYAH DETAINEE,  
MAS SELAMAT BIN KASTARI,  
FROM THE WHITLEY ROAD  
DETENTION CENTRE**

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## Executive Summary

1. The Committee of Inquiry (“COI”) completed its inquiry into the escape of Mas Selamat bin Kastari (“Mas Selamat”) from Whitley Road Detention Centre (“WRDC”) on Wednesday, 27 Feb 2008. The COI submitted its report to the Minister for Home Affairs on Thursday, 10 Apr 2008.
2. In the process of arriving at its findings and recommendations, the COI was given unrestricted access to highly classified and security sensitive information. The COI also received full cooperation from all relevant agencies.

## Mas Selamat’s Escape

3. The COI finds that on Wednesday, 27 Feb 2008, Mas Selamat escaped from WRDC between 3:54pm and 4:05pm. He was scheduled for his weekly family visit from 4:00pm to 4:30pm. The family visit was to take place in an assigned Family Visit Room, in a Family Visitation Block, at WRDC. As part of the family visit routine, Mas Selamat was escorted by two Gurkha Contingent (“GC”) guards and a WRDC Special Duty Operative (“SDO”) to a changing room for him to change out of the WRDC-issued attire into his own civilian clothes. Mas Selamat was then escorted to a toilet located next to the Family Visit Room to shave and comb his hair as part of the family visit routine. After entering the urinal cubicle inside the toilet, Mas Selamat closed the urinal cubicle door. He flipped a pair of greenish-grey pants that he was wearing over the concrete ledge above the urinal cubicle door, and turned on the water tap inside this cubicle.
4. The COI believes that while inside the urinal cubicle, Mas Selamat climbed onto the ledge located just below the ventilation window, pushed open the ventilation window and squeezed himself through it. To help his descent, he probably held on to a water pipe running vertically down the external wall of the toilet. The COI received forensic evidence from CID that smudges were found on the water pipe, although there were no conclusive fingerprints. A packet of 7 rolls of toilet paper was found on the ground adjacent to the external wall, which he could have used to break his fall when he descended.
5. Having climbed down the water pipe, Mas Selamat was on the ground at the rear of the Family Visitation Block. There is no conclusive evidence of the exact route Mas Selamat took to escape. However, the COI’s view is that Mas Selamat was likely to have used a route 20 metres to the right of the ventilation window [as one faces the perimeter fences from the ventilation window]. This is where the inner and outer perimeter fences converged with the enclosed staircase and walkway. Mas Selamat would have scaled the fence, climbed onto the roof of the enclosed staircase and walkway, and jumped over the

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converged perimeter fences. In a re-enactment requested by the COI, a GC guard took 49 seconds to climb out of the ventilation window in the urinal cubicle, scale the fence, climb onto the roof of the enclosed staircase and walkway, and jump over the converged perimeter fences.

6. The COI did not make any findings as to the route Mas Selamat took after jumping over the converged perimeter fences. Pinpointing a specific route would have been speculative, given the many possibilities and the lack of evidence on this issue. Nonetheless, the COI asked for a re-enactment of the shortest and most direct route from outside the converged fences to the Pan Island Expressway. This attempt was made by a young investigation officer and it took him 2 minutes 44 seconds to do so.
7. The COI believes that the 11 minutes between 3:54pm and 4:05pm would have provided Mas Selamat with ample time to make good his escape from the time he entered the toilet. This is notwithstanding the fact that Mas Selamat is older and less fit than the GC guard and the young investigation officer who had undertaken the re-enactments.

### Factors Contributing to Mas Selamat's Escape

8. The COI finds that Mas Selamat was able to escape because of the confluence of a number of factors. These were:
  - The GC guard escorting Mas Selamat did not stop Mas Selamat from closing the urinal cubicle door in the Family Visitation Block toilet;
  - The ventilation window in the urinal cubicle had not been secured by grilles; and
  - The weakness in the perimeter fencing where the outer and inner perimeter fences converged with an enclosed staircase and walkway leading to the Family Visitation Block was not detected.
9. In addition, the COI finds that the following factors might have contributed to providing Mas Selamat more time to make good his escape:
  - The two GC guards and the SDO escorting Mas Selamat failed to respond immediately and decisively when they noticed Mas Selamat was taking too long in the urinal cubicle;
  - The SDO escorting Mas Selamat failed to check if Mas Selamat had changed out of his WRDC-issued attire into his civilian clothes. The COI believes that Mas Selamat must have been wearing at least two layers of clothing when he emerged from the Locker Room; and
  - No one was actively monitoring the two CCTV cameras covering the outer and inner perimeter fences at the rear of the Family Visitation Block.

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10. The COI notes that no one individual had full control to bring about such confluence of these factors at the material time. The COI finds no evidence of connivance or collusion with or assistance given to Mas Selamat in his escape on the part of any individual.
11. The COI is of the view that the routine use of the toilet in the Family Visitation Block would have provided him with the opportunity to plan his escape. There was evidence that Mas Selamat was testing the reaction of the GC guards by closing the urinal cubicle door on previous occasions. This would also have given him the opportunity to climb onto the ledge in the urinal cubicle to survey the rear of the Family Visitation Block. The COI is also of the view that by the time Mas Selamat was brought out of his cell on 27 Feb 2008, he had intended to escape that day because he wore his WRDC-issued attire under his civilian clothes when he emerged from the Locker Room. However, had the confluence of factors not occurred on 27 Feb 2008, Mas Selamat would probably have deferred putting his escape plan into action. Hence the COI believes that Mas Selamat had pre-planned his escape over a period of time and seized the opportunity provided him by the confluence of a number of factors at the material time.

### Post-Escape Response

12. The COI finds that the GC guards' response following the discovery of Mas Selamat's escape at 4:05pm was sufficiently prompt and in accordance with procedures. The GC Stand-to plan was immediately activated. The cordon along Onraet Road was set up by 4:10pm, 5 minutes after Mas Selamat's escape was discovered.
13. The COI also finds that GC HQ's response was sufficiently prompt. The GC Wing Commander arrived by 4:30pm, within 20 minutes of GC HQ being informed. The GC Trackers, who had been activated, arrived at 4.35pm.
14. After the alarm was raised, Whitley Road Complex ("WRC") was locked down. The inner and outer gates of WRC were closed and thorough checks were conducted on all vehicles leaving WRC. ISD also sought Police's assistance to activate resources for search and to establish cordons and road blocks around WRC at 4:20pm.

### WRDC's Operations, Systems and Processes

15. The COI examined WRDC's operations, systems and processes in the following areas: command and control, communications and coordination, system of audits, training of GC Guards, joint planning and exercises, risk

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assessment of detainees, and policy on handcuffs. The COI also examined the actions of various individuals vis-à-vis their responsibilities to assess whether and how these had contributed to the operational lapses.

## Recommendations

16. The COI's view is that the custodial protocols and procedures of WRDC detainees are generally sound. Detainees are secured in individual cells to prevent them from communicating with one another. Different blocks are linked via enclosed walkways to prevent detainees from familiarising themselves with the layout of WRDC. Access within and across blocks is tightly controlled to prevent detainees from escaping. When a detainee moves within the WRDC compound, he is escorted by at least two GC guards, and his movements are logged. The overall guard to detainee ratio in WRDC is much higher than that in a Prisons facility to ensure tight security. GC guards are also rotated regularly. This also prevents familiarity with detainees.
17. However, the COI finds some weaknesses in operationalising WRDC's systems and processes. To rectify these weaknesses, the COI recommends the following:
  - Recommendation 1: ISD to assume overall command and control of WRDC, including security.
  - Recommendation 2: ISD to establish a formal framework of communications among the three functional groups (WRDC Administration, GC guards and Operations Group) in WRDC that supplements direct communications between officers from different functional groups on the ground. Where instructions are given or changes occur that have an impact on another functional group, they should be communicated to the latter's higher management formally, so that appropriate Orders or Standard Operating Procedures ("SOP") can be updated and training programmes reviewed accordingly.
  - Recommendation 3: As WRDC is an ISD facility, ISD HQ must clarify the responsibilities of officers in all three functional groups in relation to one another. The Superintendent must ultimately take command and control over WRDC's day-to-day operations, and have oversight of the procedures and practices of all ISD officers and GC guards deployed at WRDC.
  - Recommendation 4: ISD HQ, WRDC Administration and GC HQ to establish a more structured feedback mechanism.
  - Recommendation 5: WRDC Administration and GC HQ to develop a comprehensive training programme for WRDC staff and GC guards deployed at WRDC.
  - Recommendation 6: WRDC Administration to develop a more structured framework to communicate risks posed by certain detainees to GC guards.

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- Recommendation 7: WRDC Administration to consider instituting a system of regular audits to ensure that instructions are carried out and procedures are adhered to.
- Recommendation 8: ISD HQ to institute a system of checks and balances through (1) Regular review of WRDC security by Protective Security (“PS”) Command; (2) Process by which WRDC Administration must seek proper security assessment from PS Command in writing before any change in escort procedures or use of facilities by detainees is approved; and (3) the Superintendent must obtain approval from Director, ISD before he overrules any recommendation by PS Command.
- Recommendation 9: WRDC Administration and GC HQ to jointly develop a robust response plan for major incidents. Joint ground exercises should also be conducted regularly to validate and improve these plans.
- Recommendation 10: ISD HQ to consider having WRDC purpose-built from design on a new site and to revisit its previous plans to co-locate within the Changi Prison Complex.

## Conclusion

18. The COI’s recommendations are made with the primary aim of addressing the operational lapses that resulted in Mas Selamat’s escape, and improving the overall system of security at WRDC, to minimise, if not eliminate, the risk of future escapes. If accepted, there is a need to ensure the proper implementation of these recommendations and periodic reviews of their continued effectiveness.