

Tamil Information

NEWS BULLETIN OF
THE TAMIL INFORMATION CENTRE



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FEBRUARY 1993

No. 19

UNHCR Must Speak Out For The Safety And Dignity Of Refugees

UNHCR will insist on full disclosure of agreements between Western and Sri Lankan governments relating to return of refugees and in the absence of disclosure, UNHCR will not become involved in any repatriation programme, said UNHCR officials participating in the NGO information meeting in Geneva on 11 February. Representatives of many European NGOs were present and Mr. Blatter, UNHCR Director, Regional Bureau for Asia and Oceania and Bo Schack Regional Legal Adviser for Asia and Oceania participated in the meeting. NGOs raised concerns relating to the Indian repatriation programme and the situation in Sri Lanka. The Tamil Information Centre tabled a special issue of the *Tamil Information* containing all relevant issues and pointed out that returning refugees were at great risk and the involvement of UNHCR at this stage would lead to 'refoulement'.

UNHCR officials said that some governments are independently making decisions about the people whom they claim "not to be refugees" and tend to make bi-lateral agreements to return those who are said to be not in need of international protection. UNHCR said that they have had discussions with governments and continue to have dialogue with a number of NGOs interested in the situation in Sri Lanka. The UNHCR office in Colombo is already in the process of compiling a list of Sri Lankan NGOs,

said Mr Schack. He added that UNHCR officials in Sri Lanka were having discussions with a number of human rights organisations and gathering information on local security conditions. UNHCR was always blamed earlier, he said, for the problems facing the returnees when governments return them. Governments could not remain aloof but must take the responsibility and ensure the safety of the returnees. UNHCR said that governments were shirking responsibility.

UNHCR would not be involved where bilateral agreements on return of refugees remain undisclosed. UNHCR would request the respective governments to adhere to acceptable procedures in determining asylum applications and would examine as far as possible whether the asylum procedures have been exhausted before returns begin. UNHCR has also requested governments to issue travel documents to refugees who are being returned. Refugees must hold travel documents issued by the host government or the Sri Lankan mission, as they are liable to be arrested on arrival in Sri Lanka without valid travel documents.

UNHCR said that monitoring would be "passive", that is, UNHCR will not become involved with any returnee unless they have problems. But, in case the returnee faces personal security problems, UNHCR together with the embassy of the country having returned the refugee, would take appropriate action with

the Sri Lankan authorities. UNHCR say that when refugees are returned, they would be provided with details to gain access to UNHCR and the respective diplomatic missions in Sri Lanka. Friends and relatives could contact either the UNHCR or the embassy of the country from where the refugee had been returned if the returnee faced any problem. TIC raised doubts and concern about such a monitoring process. It drew attention to the complex political and military situation in Sri Lanka and said that a number of refugees, particularly Tamil youths who were actively involved politically and militarily in various militant and other groups would face certain death if they are to be returned now without any assurance of security and the envisaged 'passive monitoring' by UNHCR would not provide any protection to them.

According to UNHCR refugee returns envisaged from the West would be limited on an experimental basis. Rejected asylum seekers who had arrived in Western countries recently would be returned first. The Swiss government plans to begin repatriation of Tamils in small numbers on a 'last come first' basis. It is expected about 200 Tamils will be returned in six months' time. The aim is to deter refugees coming to Switzerland.

UNHCR also said that it had agreed to provide assistance to build 500 houses in Colombo. This, UNHCR say are not necessarily for

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the returnees. They are for displaced people.

UNHCR also drew attention to TIC's proposal of a 'returnee reception unit at Katunayake airport' made in June 1992 and said that their discussions with governments would overcome the concerns raised by TIC at that time. TIC's proposal was mainly to avoid creation of reception centres in Colombo and to establish a mechanism to provide adequate protection for the returnees in the event of involuntary returns of refugees for political reasons without any consideration for the safety and dignity of people by governments. Currently there is no such mechanism although refugees are being returned.

Referring to the Indian repatriation programme, UNHCR officials said 29,000 Tamils had returned from Tamil Nadu. The last batch arrived in Sri Lanka on 20 October 1992 and the programme is scheduled to recommence in mid-February. UNHCR and individual NGOs had requested both the Indian and Sri Lankan governments to establish a clear monitoring process. The Indian government had assured UNHCR that refugee returns would be voluntary. But the NGOs present hardly accepted that returns were voluntary. TIC made it clear that returns cannot be considered voluntary. Refugees were subjected to harassment and intimidation by Indian officials. TIC drew attention to the letter received by the Collector, Tiruchirappalli District from the Rehabilitation Commissioner, Madras (Ref:C2.22503/92) which is self evident that refugees in the camps were denied the provision of relief and welfare services by NGOs. UNHCR officials admitted that UNHCR had no access to the refugee camps, but failed to admit a continuing problem, perhaps for political reasons.

UNHCR also said it was unable to monitor all the returns. But, refugees were chosen and interviewed before the return. No mention however was

made as to how they were chosen.

Around 9,000 Tamil refugees have arrived on Mannar Island, 70% of whom have been able to return to their homes, according to UNHCR. The balance 30% are from LTTE-controlled areas and the Sri Lankan government has recently decided to allow people to go into these areas.

UNHCR say 16 returnees were arrested by the Sri Lankan army for activities before fleeing to India. They have all been released following UNHCR's intervention. One returnee has been arrested for militant activity after arriving from India. Another 11 arrests have taken place in villages for involvement in militant activities after arrival, UNHCR say.

UNHCR tabled at the Geneva meeting the information note distributed to Tamil refugees in India and said that the note was being updated. Mr Schack said that he had visited Jaffna and in addition to meetings with the NGO consortium and the Government Agent also held talks with Anton Balasingam and Yogi Yogaratnam of the LTTE. LTTE's position was that refugees should not be returned at this point in time, but requested UNHCR to manage the camps in Jaffna, if refugees are sent back involuntarily.

UNHCR officials said people were living in difficult conditions in the North. Local NGOs have requested UNHCR to have a safe passage opened between the peninsula and the south where people could cross without fear, have the ban on some essential items lifted and assist in reopening fishing facilities. UNHCR said that opening of the Pooneryn-Sangupiddy crossing may be negotiated, but there was the need to address the question whether UNHCR or ICRC would monitor the crossings.

Number of other issues raised in the meeting by the NGOs were not commented on by UNHCR, particularly the concept of 'passive

monitoring', safety of Tamil refugees returned to Sri Lanka and the increasing number of applicants failing to become political refugees and categorised as those who need no international protection. UNHCR agreed that these issues are important and that there was a need for a whole day conference to address such issues.

What of the future? From what we gathered the problems will continue. Our primary concern is the safety of the people. Whether or not they are defined as refugees, the number of people displaced and who flee the country will continue to grow until a just solution is reached when people could return voluntarily in safety and dignity. Tamils are aware that in many of the European countries today, there are several hundreds of thousands of people without any status, without jobs, without housing, without medical attention and living a hand to mouth existence, which is causing them social and political difficulties. The system has broken down in a number of countries and it is breaking down all over Europe. There has been an increasing politicisation of the refugee issue and there is a tendency of passing on the responsibility for refugees and their well-being onto international organisations. The word from governments to UNHCR appears to be - We cannot have them, but if you want to send them somewhere, you can have them.

What the Tamils wish to urge UNHCR - Immigration is a political issue but the humanitarian question such as that of refugees and asylum should not become a political football of the European governments. UNHCR must speak out and take responsibility for the safety and dignity of people fleeing conditions in which they can no longer live in peace.

TEACHING HOSPITAL WITHOUT X-RAY MACHINE

The Jaffna teaching hospital is functioning without an X-ray machine. The Health Ministry has indicated that a machine has to be imported. Medical services in the meantime suffer at this premier hospital in the district.

CLOCK TOWERS TAKE PRECEDENCE

President of the University Teachers Association Prof Nalin de Silva speaking at a seminar on free education criticised the government for giving priority to the building of 300 clock towers at a cost of Rs.12 million while neglecting the upkeep of the university curriculum which would cost only Rs.8 million.

SOLDIERS IN CUSTODY

The Defence Ministry has requested a crackdown on indiscipline among soldiers after three soldiers were apprehended for a major robbery at Kohuwela and two others were arrested for a criminal offence at Moratuwa both in the Colombo District. Military top brass were further embarrassed by the arrest in Maldives of a soldier who went missing from his post in the Mannar District.

ALL VILLAGERS SUSPECT

The Special Task Forces surrounded the villages of Pandiruppu, Kaluvanchikudy, Eruvil, Kaluthavalai, and Kurumanvely in the Batticaloa District recently. All those between the ages of 11 and 45 were led away to the Pandiruppu Army Camp for interrogation.

TIC ACCESSION LIST

A Selection of Documents received by TIC in February 1993

SGN 258

Pathmanaba Iyer, Sornavally

Ilankaiyil toddap pallikkudankalin kalviyamaippum pitaccanaikalum

Jaffna: Tamiliyal; 1988

108p.

DESCRIPTORS: Plantation workers / Education / History

SHR 3008

Sri Lanka: internal flight alternatives: question and answer series

Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board; December 1992.

27p.

DESCRIPTORS: Detention / Disappearances / Recommendation / Human Rights violation / LTTE / Refugees / Sri Lanka

SHR 3051

Sri Lanka: an assessment of the human rights situation

London: Amnesty International; January 1993

21p.

DESCRIPTORS: Tamil Refugees / UNHCR / Economic blockade / Human Rights violation / LTTE / Tamil Homeland / Hill Country / Southern Province / Relief / Repatriation / JVP

SGN 257

Arumugam, S

More Hindu temples of Sri Lanka: ancient, medieval and modern

104p.

DESCRIPTORS: Hindu Temples / Sri Lanka / Hindu Gods

SGN 258

Poologasingham, Pon

Ten Polutu by Pon Poologasinham and Kanaga Sukumar: a collection of interviews with artists and writers (text in Tamil)

Jaffna: 'Citittiran Veliyidu; 1958

179p.

DESCRIPTORS: Artists / Writers / Tamils

PB

Veliccam: a Tamil periodical

Jaffna: Vidutalaip Pulikalin Kalai, Panpadduk Kalakam; December 1992

40p.

DESCRIPTORS: Liberation Struggle / Short stories / Poems

SHR 3052

Statement on the death of Tamil leader Kittu by International War Crimes Tribunal

London: IWCT; January 23rd 1993

1p.

DESCRIPTORS: Statement / Commission of Inquiry / International Law

PC 4616

Wignaraja, Ponna

A new social contract: Nature and magnitude of endemic poverty

Sri Lanka; Lanka Guardian;

15 December 1992

8p

DESCRIPTORS: South Asia / Poverty

FEBRUARY DIARY

FEBRUARY 1

OPERATION BLACK FOX: A curfew was clamped in the districts of Mannar, Vavuniya and Mullaitivu as the forces took another offensive against LTTE positions. Aircraft gave cover for ground troops and security sources claimed that troops brought more areas under their control without any resistance.

FEBRUARY 2

HEAVY DEATH TOLL: Official sources claimed that security forces advanced in the Mathakal area, Jaffna District with air and naval cover. Several LTTE defence positions were overrun and bodies of five LTTE men were recovered. Five soldiers including an officer also lost their lives in this confrontation.

FEBRUARY 3

RELIGIOUS OPTION: The Galle District Sangha Sabha passed a resolution condemning the communal crescendo achieved during the 15 year UNP rule. Buddhist monks who spoke there were critical of the SLFP for its family squabble and of the federal idea which they claimed would be the death knell for the Sinhalese. According to the chief Sangha Nayake Rev. Pallathara Sumanajothi the tactics of the LTTE made a military solution the only remedy for the country's ills.

FEBRUARY 4

RISK ALLOWANCE: Employees of the Jaffna District secretariat have appealed for the payment of risk allowance to them in a memorandum sent to the President through the Government Agent, Jaffna. The continuing economic blockade and the countless military offensives have been cited as the reasons for this claim.

FEBRUARY 5

OVER POWERING FUMES: Eleven soldiers including two officers

were rushed to Anuradhapura for treatment after becoming unconscious at a camp in the Jaffna District where they had been overcome by noxious fumes.

FEBRUARY 6

TAMIL YOUTHS ARRESTED: Seventeen Tamil youths were arrested in the Colombo Fort area for not being in possession of identity cards.

FEBRUARY 7

SHANMUGATHASAN DIES: Veteran Maoist, trade unionist and leader of Communist Party (Peking Wing) N. Shanmugathasan died of a heart attack in Birmingham at the age of 74.

FEBRUARY 8

KILALI CROSSING: An army spokesman reported the destruction of 10 boats that crossing the Jaffna lagoon from Kilinochchi to Jaffna. These 10 were among 20 boats that attempted the trip transporting goods to the peninsula, according to the Army.

FEBRUARY 9

CONSTABLE KILLED: Police constable Ravindran aged 32 years was shot dead by unidentified persons while on guard duty in the Vavuniya District Court premises. Although taken to hospital by other officers he succumbed to his injuries.

FEBRUARY 10

ESTATE STRIKE: Estate workers in the Nuwara Eliya District were on strike following the assault on 40 workers who were attempting a peaceful sit-in opposite the Municipal office. The beaten workers were arrested by the Police who charged them with disturbing the peace.

FEBRUARY 11

KILALI CROSSING AGAIN: Brigadier Angamana reported the destruction of 7 boats and the capture of 6 in the Kilali area of the Jaffna

lagoon. In a similar incident a day later 7 boats were destroyed and an equal number were captured according to him. Eleven bodies washed ashore were taken to Kilinochchi hospital.

GOVERNMENT CREATES PATIENTS:

Jaffna MP K Navaratnam charged in Parliament that the government was creating patients in the North by supplying inadequate medical supplies where the need is great due to the ongoing war. Even Aspirins and herbs are not being allowed by the JOC past the army checkpoints at Vavuniya. The death rate has risen and under-nourished children easily fall sick. The MP questioned whether the North was a part of India for the government to act in this fashion.

FEBRUARY 12:

SCHOOL BOMBED: St. Theresa's Girls School, Kilinochchi District was the target of bombing by the air force. Several school girls were injured in this attack which occurred at 9.15 a.m. Three seriously injured students were rushed to Vavuniya hospital with ICRC assistance.

The air force also scored a direct hit at the Karadippokku branch of the co-operative store. The branch manager and two traders received serious injuries and the ICRC assisted in their despatch to the hospital.

FEBRUARY 13:

ATTACKS FOILED: A Two-pronged attack by the LTTE on the Naval detachment in the Kilali lagoon had been beaten back according to a JOC report. This report also referred to 4 rebels being killed in Verugal, Trincomalee District.

FEBRUARY 14 :

STRICT SECURITY: Security was stepped up in the Amparai District with detailed inspections at checkpoints including video filming of persons. Tamil villages in Akkarai-

FEBRUARY DIARY

pattu came under severe scrutiny and several persons were arrested.

FEBRUARY 15

MEMORANDUM: The Jaffna Hindu Congress in a memorandum to the President appealed for free access to the peninsula to ensure the flow of foodstocks. The Congress emphasized that the disruption of transport to the North had brought starvation to the population and urged an urgent political solution to end the ethnic conflict.

FEBRUARY 16

POONERYN EXERCISES: Ground forces tried to advance towards Alankerni from Pooneran Camp. Airforce planes bombed the Alankerni and Kilinochchi areas to assist ground troops.

FEBRUARY 17

FERRY SERVICE CLOSED: Public in the Manner mainland were inconvenienced by the closing of the ferry service to Vidathaltivu. No reason had been adduced for this closure ordered by the security forces.

FEBRUARY 18:

MILITARY OR ECONOMIC: Cabinet spokesman Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe disclosed that the LTTE had rejected the opening of the Pooneryn route to the North, a proposal made by the Government and conveyed through the UNHCR.

The LTTE in a statement explained that it had only called for the forward guard positions of the Pooneryn camp to be removed for the safety of the passengers.

FEBRUARY 19:

WRIT GLUT: Writ petitions were filed by the Legal Division of the Human Rights Development Centre in the Appeal Court in respect of 22 Tamils held in detention at Pelwatte Camp for over 2 years without

indictment.

FEBRUARY 20:

DISCRIMINATION IN EDUCATION: Speaking at a public function at Kandeketiya Minister Thondaman compared the schooling available in the Panwila area. A school for every 5300 Sinhalese students, a school for every 5200 Muslim students and a school for every 23,000 Tamil students existed in this area according to the Minister.

FEBRUARY 21:

CAMPS DESTROYED: The JOC reported the destruction of a LTTE camp with 15 underground shelters in Kuchchaveli, Trincomalee District. A large stock of food had been left behind by the rebels who withdrew into the jungles. The army estimated several casualties among the LTTE men.

FEBRUARY 22:

NO RELIEF FOR RETURNEES: Some refugee returnees at Thambalgamam, Trincomalee District are yet to receive the cash relief which is the only assistance made available to them. Food rations have not been distributed and kerosene is also not issued. Without electricity and kerosene the returnees live in darkness after sunset.

FEBRUARY 23:

AIRCRAFT TARGET SCHOOLS: Jaffna MP K Navaratnam speaking in Parliament said that the new attack aircraft purchased by the air force were targetting school buildings in Jaffna in their combat trials.

OPERATION RANABIMA: An indefinite curfew was imposed in the Northern Peninsula and an army offensive code named Battle Field was set in motion with air and naval cover for ground troops. Brigadier Angamana disclosed that all the objective of the operation were

achieved in the Mathagal area, Jaffna District. Five solidiers were injured and one LTTE member was killed, the spokesman added.

CAMP ATTACKED: Nanattan army camp in the Mannar District was attacked by the LTTE resulting in the death of five soldiers and injury to nine others.

FEBRUARY 25:

GUINNESS RECORD: Batticaloa MP Josph Pararajasingam said in Parliament that a state of emergency that was in force for 5320 days was a Guinness record for any Government in the world. This amounts to 15 years out of the 45 years of independence for the country. He also revealed that nearly 70,000 citizens had been killed in the last 15 years and 75% of them were from the North-East.

FEBRUARY 26:

SEA MINE: A JOC spokesman reported the death of two sailors and injuries to two others when their patrol boat hit a sea mine in the Kilali area of the Jaffna Lagoon. Major damage had also been caused to the naval craft.

FEBRUARY 27

CIVILIAN CASUALITIES: Three civilians were killed and two were injured when the air force bombed Iluppaikadavai village, Mannar district at 10am. A mother Thabothini age 29 and her child Pradeepa age 8 seriously injured in this bombing were despatched to Anuradhapura hospital with ICRC assistance.

FEBRUARY 28

JAFFNA LAGOON: In a flurry of activity across the Jaffna lagoon thousands of passengers stranded for several days succeeded in crossing the prohibited waters amid shell fire directed from the Elephant Pass army camp.

NGOs Urge Recognition of Tamil Right to Self-determination

Fifteen non-governmental organisations with UN consultative status submitted a joint statement to the 49th Sessions of the UN Commission on Human Rights on 8 February urging recognition that Tamils of North-East Sri Lanka constitute a 'people' with the right of self-determination.

Among the signatories were the International Organisation for the Elimination of All Forms Racial Discrimination, World Confederation of Labour and International Education Development. The NGOs also urged the Commission to accord open recognition to the existence of the Tamil Homeland in the North and East of the island.

The NGOs said that any meaningful attempt to resolve the Sri Lankan conflict should address its underlying causes and recognise that the armed struggle of the Tamil people for self-determination arose as a response to decades of an ever widening and deepening oppression by a permanent Sinhala majority, within the confines of a unitary state.

The statement referred to the oppression which included denial of citizenship and disenfranchisement of the plantation Tamils, systematic state-aided Sinhalese colonisation of the Tamil Homeland, the enactment of the Sinhala only law, discriminatory employment policies, inequitable allocation of resources to Tamil areas, exclusion of eligible Tamil students from universities and higher education and refusal to share power within the framework of a federal constitution. Such oppression has consolidated the growth of the national consciousness of the Tamil people.

During the past several years, the statement continues, the Sinhalese dominated Sri Lankan government has

attempted to put down the armed resistance of the Tamil people and has sought to conquer and control the Tamil Homeland. The record shows that in this attempt Sri Lanka's armed forces and para military units have committed increasingly widespread violations of the rules of humanitarian law.

In the East whole villages of Tamils have been attacked by the army and the Home Guards. Many Tamil residents in these villages were killed. Others have been tortured. Those Tamils who were detained by the Sri Lankan authorities have had little or no hope of coming out alive. The attacks on the Tamil Homeland have been coupled with the declared opposition of the Sri Lankan government to the merger of the North and East of the island into a single administrative and political unit.

The NGOs stated, despite the sustained attacks of Sinhalese dominated governments over a period of several decades, the territorial integrity of the Tamil Homeland in the North and East of the island has remained. The Tamil population in the North and East who have lived for many centuries within relatively well defined geographical boundaries, share an ancient heritage, a vibrant culture and a living language which traces its origins to more than 2,500 years ago. A social group which shares objective elements such as a common language and which has acquired a subjective consciousness of togetherness, by its life within a relatively well defined territory and its struggle against alien domination, clearly constitutes a 'people' with the right to self-determination.

The NGOs emphasised that there is an urgent need for the international community to recognise that the Tamil people in the North and East are such

a 'people' with the right to freely choose their political status. The NGOs said that they were of the view that such recognition will prepare the ground for the resolution of a conflict which has taken such a heavy toll in human lives and suffering during the past several years.

In a statement answering the submission of the NGOs, Sri Lanka's ambassador Bernard Goonetilleke said that Sri Lanka in its entirety is the homeland of the Tamil people just the same way it is the homeland of the Sinhalese and other minorities and that 23% of the Sri Lankan Tamils live outside the North-East. He also referred to the Plantation Tamils whom he says never supported the claims of North-East Tamils for a separate state and are represented in government by senior members of the Cabinet. This statement may be justified if the Tamils had equal rights in all aspects of Sri Lankan life and were able to live in peace and dignity. The Tamils have not only been discriminated since independence in 1948 as pointed out by the NGOs but also violence amounting the genocide has been perpetrated against them from 1956.

The most affected in the anti-Tamil genocidal massacres of 1958, 1977, 1981 and 1983 were those Tamils living outside the North-East, including the plantation Tamils. After these violences the governments themselves have provided ships for the survivors and refugees to be taken to the North-East.

The plantation Tamils have remained the most economically deprived group in the island, although they contribute the most to the economic well-being of the whole of Sri Lankan society. They have been disenfranchised and denied citizenship resulting in enormous hardship to

families and individuals. The appointment of ministers to represent them has made little impact on their economic position. Under the current privatisation programme which these ministers support, the meagre wages of plantation workers have fallen by a large amount and welfare facilities have deteriorated subjecting them to further hardship.

Mr. Goonetilleke also said that the Tamils are a minority in the Eastern Province. This was achieved by government-planned Sinhalese colonisation over a period of four decades in the Eastern Province where Tamils have been forcibly evicted from their lands. Sinhalese colonisation has been carried out with the intention of changing demographic

patterns thus making the Tamils a minority in their own traditional homeland. Colonisation in the East continues unabated. Lands and houses vacated by Tamils fleeing violence have been occupied. In Trincomalee currently even Hindu temple lands have been taken over. Complaints made to President Premadasa are of no avail.

Mr. Goonetilleke also delivered a veiled threat. If the Commission were to accept the two requests made by the NGOs, Mr. Goonetilleke said, not only will it be interfering in the internal affairs of Sri Lanka, but also, will put the future of the Tamil population living outside Northern and Eastern Province in jeopardy. Grave violation of human rights is a

matter for international concern. This is not the first time that a threat has been made against Tamils living in the South. Similar threats have earlier been made by Sri Lankan representatives in international fora and the threats have been carried out and are being carried out.

Observers say that the Human Rights Commission will not make strictures against Sri Lanka at the current sessions in view of the cosmetic measures taken by the Sri Lankan government to improve human rights, despite pronouncement of human rights workers that the human rights situation has deteriorated. It appears that the Commission would once again fail to contribute towards peace in Sri Lanka.

THE UN WORKING GROUP REPORTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN SRI LANKA

The Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances in its report on Sri Lanka to the 49th Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights says Emergency Regulations while enlarging the powers of law enforcement officials and military forces in matters of arrest and detention, fail to contain provisions for the protection of persons against abuses committed by those forces. It has been found that persons are held in detention for more than the maximum of 18 months allowed under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) without trial, persons detained under Emergency Regulations for more than 180 days, persons detained without detention orders and a number of persons whose release had been ordered by the Supreme Court but were still held in detention camps and police stations.

The Working Group also reported that the police and military lacked the knowledge of rules of arrest and detention and this was compounded

by the fact that the texts of Emergency Regulations are not accessible to the public or even to the Lawyers. Those responsible for administering justice did not have fully updated texts of the Regulations.

The Working Group further said that according to Lawyers' organisations in almost 98% of the cases where habeas corpus applications were filed in 1992, the security officers denied arrest in spite of being positive identification of those responsible for arrests. In a great majority of cases of disappearance where the arrest was clearly established, the State filed objections stating that the missing person had escaped from custody, had been killed while attempting to escape or had been released.

According to the Working Group, since its establishment in 1980, 6,716 cases of disappearance in Sri Lanka have been reported by non-governmental sources. Those cases have been transmitted to the Sri

Lankan government. In addition the Working Group has received nearly 5,000 cases which occurred in the south and central provinces between 1988 and 1990 and nearly 2,000 cases in the North-East since June 1990.

The Working Group says the persons most often reported detained and missing continue to be young Tamil men suspected of belonging to or aiding or sympathising with the LTTE. Tamil persons internally displaced due to the conflict and who are staying in informal shelters such as church or school centres are the group particularly at risk of detention and disappearance. In addition to young men the Working Group has received cases of women, children and infants having been detained and subsequently disappearing from these centres. Missing persons also include teachers, students, farmers, business persons, fishermen and family members of persons taken into detention.

Situation Report

FOOD AND FUEL SHORTAGE

The GA, Jaffna district reported the acute shortage of food and kerosene oil in the district at a conference held in Colombo on 23 February. It was disclosed that a bottle of kerosene fetched Rs. 350 in the North and this was devastating the agricultural production as water pumps could not be operated.

TAMILS DISCRIMINATED IN EDUCATION

Tamil candidates who applied for the competitive examination to be selected as clerical officers at the Central Provincial Council in Kandy were disappointed at the non-availability of question papers in Tamil. They had to leave the examination hall as the paper in Sinhala was beyond their comprehension. Complaints have been made with the Chief Minister on this matter by Plantation Sector trade Unionist and member of the Provincial Council Mr. A. Ramaiah.

SECURITY FOR THE RESETTLED

The question of providing adequate security to those resettled figured prominently at a conference recently held at the Mannar district secretariat. The additional Government Agent met the representatives of the resettled refugees at this conference. The Bishop of Mannar Rev. Rayappu Joseph explained that the NGOs and the state were involved in this resettlement and the NGOs were the catalyst and the state had to initiate the whole process. The vocations of the resettled could be pursued only if security could be ensured. This was more so in the case of fishing by the resettled refugees in the Mannar district according to the Bishop.

CHILDREN DIE IN HOSPITAL

Twenty children admitted to the Jaffna district Hospital in January from among 400 died due to lack of essential drugs. The 400 admissions were for diarrhoea, malaria, pneumonia and viral fever. Over 3,000 such cases were reported in the Jaffna peninsula according to the Jaffna teaching hospital sources.

DESTRUCTION INEVITABLE

In the Independence day message to the people President Premadasa said until a solution was found to the North-East problem destruction of life and property was inevitable. Wasting of large amounts of public funds was also inevitable according to the president.

LEFT HELPLESS

Batticaloa MP Mavai Senathirajah toured the Tamil villages in the Ampara District meeting the occupants over a period of seven days. Moved by the plight of Tamils who were being represented over their grievances described their position as being helpless. Though facing immense discrimination these Tamils had no one to turn to. Large numbers of widows and orphans especially in the Akkaraipattu, Sammanthurai and Kalmunai areas were undergoing severe hardship according to the MP. Frequent arrest of males was reported to the MP.

70,000 REFUGEES

District secretariat, Batticaloa revealed the latest figure for refugees in the district as 70,205 belonging to 16,907 families. 7,431 from among them are in 20 refugee camps. The balance 62,744 persons have taken refuge with friends and relatives.

STEEP INCREASE IN PRICES

With the prohibition of the only access route to the peninsula through the Jaffna lagoon the economic blockade of the North had been turned into a tighter noose. Most food items are scarce and the current price when available stood at 1Kg of rice Rs.52, a bottle of coconut oil Rs. 120, a coconut Rs.25, a loaf of bread Rs.7.50. Malnutrition was rampant and the lack of medical services and drugs have heightened the death rate among the population.

FIRE DESTROYS REFUGEE CAMP

The refugee camp at Karaitivu, Ampara District was destroyed by a fire. Tamil refugees from 103 families in the 13 huts were housed in this camp. Two infants were burnt to death and one had been identified as Vijayakumar Santhan aged 4 years.

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