Parents withdraw kids from schools in LTTE held areas of Batticaloa

Roy Mendis in Colombo, 4.08 PM SLT Wednesday September 26, 2001. Schools in the LTTE controlled areas of Batticaloa district have not been functioning for the past two or three weeks because parents are scared that the LTTE will forcibly take their children away. Forcible recruitment has been taking place here for the past two months.

Sources in Batticaloa said that the LTTE was even holding some parents hostage to secure their children. Many parents had sent their children away to safe havens in the government administered areas of the district.

Over 500 cattle worth Rs. 50 lakhs belonging to the Muslims of the district have been seized by the LTTE so far. Abduction of Muslims for ransom is also going on.

It was to put an end to this that the Brigadier in charge of the army in Batticaloa requested the area Bishop Rev. Dr. Kingsley Swamipillai to go and talk to the LTTE bosses in the area. The Bishop, who had discussions with LTTE leaders Karikalan and Vijayan Master on Tuesday, was accompanied by the Ramakrishna Mission chief Mr. S. Pathananathan, the Batticaloa Peace Committee President Mr. Anton Martin and the Human Rights Agency Centre representative Mr. S. Kamalanathan.

So far the political leaders of the area have refrained from taking up the matter with the LTTE or even voicing any opinion on it for fear of earning the wrath of the LTTE. The press has also refrained from reporting it, though forcible recruitment has been on for the past two months. It was left to the University Teachers of Human Rights (Jaffna), a small body of Tamil democrats, to expose the sordid goings on.

Tamil Bishop asks LTTE to stop forcible recruitment

Roy Mendis in Colombo, 2.57 PM SLT Wednesday September 26, 2001. Human rights activists led by the Bishop of Trincomalee and Batticaloa, Dr. Kingsley Swamipillai, met LTTE leaders Karikalan and Vijayan Master on Tuesday to plead with them to stop recruiting youngsters forcibly and appropriating lands and houses of people who would not let their wards be taken away.

The ten member team tried to impress upon the LTTE leadership that the organisation’s international image would suffer if it was perceived as an outfit forcibly recruiting people, especially kids.

The meeting took place at Ambilanthurai near Paduvankarai in the LTTE controlled part of Batticaloa district. The visit was allowed by the Ministry of Defense.

There is deep concern in Batticaloa district over the arrival of refugees from the LTTE controlled areas. Sources said that 80% of the people of Vaharai had left unable to bear the depredations of the LTTE. The government has no statistics because only inflows resulting from armed conflict are enumerated.

But the LTTE leaders were unfazed. They said that the recruits were joining voluntarily and that their parents were letting them go freely. The LTTE had only requested that each family give at least one member for the cause, Karikalan and Vijayan said.
The University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna) had said in their report dated September 20, that "conscription" of kids was going on in Batticaloa and Madu church area in West Wanni. Children of 12 and 14 were being taken away it said. Desertions are "endemic" but the kids are brought back and severely punished. Two parents, a father and a mother, were driven to attempting suicide.

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