



Tamil Information Centre

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Committed to Human Rights and Community
Development

SITUATION REPORT - No. 3

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The Sri Lankan government and the military continue to deny food to people affected by the war. Pressure is mounting on the government to allow the NGOs to provide humanitarian aid to the uprooted people from the Jaffna District who have sought refuge in Thenmaradchi and other areas. Reports suggest that nearly 5,000 people are daily crossing the Jaffna lagoon at Kilaly seeking refuge in Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu, Mannar and Vavuniya districts in the mainland. TIC sources say nearly 5,000 families have reached Mullaitivu. One relief worker who had accompanied about 100 people by foot to the Kilali crossing in heavy rains on 5th November said two men died of snakebite and eight children died of fits in the mothers' arms. Reports also say that Jaffna Hospital and the University of Jaffna have been evacuated.

The ship *M V Habarana* chartered by the ICRC was expected to take 1500 M/Tons of flour, 3 M/Tons of medical supplies (drugs), Oxygen Cylinders and, 8 M/Tons of emergency supplies which the ICRC have assembled at Trincomalee to be sent to Point Pedro. The ship is awaiting clearance from the government to sail. However, reports, received from Trincomalee say the ICRC ship planned to sail on 7 November could not sail because of the Navy causing difficulty in granting permits. Meanwhile, the ICRC has confirmed that the Sri Lankan government has asked them to co-ordinate all relief operations in the North.

According to the ICRC, northern Sri Lanka is currently in the grip of confusion and fear. The only humanitarian supply line open to the North of the island at present is the ICRC protected boats. The Tamils Rehabilitation Organisation (TRO) currently operating in Chavakachcheri was able to take small quantities of food and medicine from Vanni on the mainland. In addition to disruption by the security forces, the other major concern to the ICRC is the monsoon rains and heavy seas which may disrupt their shipping plans. The ICRC also has announced that a second ICRC-protected ship carrying 3,500 M/Tons of relief supplies is also awaiting clearance to leave Colombo.

There is concern in the UN about the situation in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan government however, does not want to increase any UN operations. According to the government, the current situation is an internal matter and they do not want anyone to internationalise the issue. It is reported that the government is planning to curtail the activities of various international NGOs and it will not permit any new NGOs wanting to provide relief to the victims in the North to enter the country fearing that their reports of the wide-scale humanitarian disaster would bring discredit to the government. Reports suggest that Mr Rajan Kadirgamar, Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka who earlier worked for the UN was using every trick of the trade to minimise the damage to his government.

Reports received from UN sources indicate that Secretary General Mr Boutros Boutros Ghali has instructed Mr Peter-Hansen, the Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs to monitor developments in Sri Lanka. Meanwhile, the UN advisor on Humanitarian Affairs has been asked to make a report on the current situation.

The International NGOs are reluctant to issue any statement describing the situation in the North, as they fear that their work would be affected following the Foreign Minister's recent statements. This attitude of the international NGOs have caused a feeling among the Tamil community that they have been let down.

Latest reports from Colombo suggest that 1,500 M/Tons of rice and 1750 M/Tons of flour are being loaded on to the ship *Kumana*. But, it is not known as to when the ship will be allowed to depart for the north. Earlier reports say that similar loading of supplies had taken place before and unloaded due to government pressure. Ship *Maho* is still in Colombo with the consignment of kerosene to Jaffna for over 28 days waiting clearance from the government.

Reports say that the government is only making promises but it is, not taking any serious efforts to provide relief to the displaced people. The Tamils are now convinced that the government is using the food issue as a military strategy and is determined to carry on even if large-scale suffering of civilians results.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Please distribute the report widely to create public awareness and encourage further lobby.

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