{From Tamil Net news}

Jaffna faces humanitarian catastrophe

Closure of A9, the only trunk road to Jaffna from rest of Sri Lanka, more than 10 weeks ago, has halted the flow of essential food provisions, and medical supplies to Jaffna Peninsula, and if urgent steps are not taken, the residents will face severe humanitarian crisis, civil society leaders in Jaffna warned Monday. Jaffna residents face malnutrition and imminent starvation; and shortage of medical supplies and doctors, have wreaked havoc with the peninsula's fragile health care system, hospital and Non Governmental Organizations (NGO) sources said.

The child specialists attached to the Jaffna Teaching hospital warned that many of the children in the Peninsula are affected by malnutrition because the provision sent by the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) is inadequate and only could fulfill 25% of the entire need of nutrition.

Inefficiency of the Government bureaucracy and the rampant corruption in the supply chain also may be exacerbating the situation, local NGO officials said. "Island," a kind of milk powder that was declared in 2000 as not suitable for consumption, was again sent to Jaffna. Out of the 200 000 milk packets sent recently, 86 000 packets are "Island."

The Directors of Education have expressed alarm at the fall of attendance figures of schoolchildren. Many attending children suffer from malnutrition and cases of many fainting in schools are reported. Enthusiasm for learning has waned dramatically, officials said.

Meanwhile, the Consortium of Jaffna district NGOs blames the GoSL and government officials for their indifference in allowing the transport of essential food items to the people of Jaffna. Some officials of the Consortium said they fear speaking in public about the real situation in Jaffna due to the overarching presence of security forces and collaborating paramilitary cadres.

The NGOs warn that understated, and quite often false, details of the needs of the people of Jaffna disseminated by the Colombo's propaganda machinery are masking a grave and tragic situation developing. Though more than 40 000 people, belonging to 12 000 families mainly from the areas near the Forward Defense Lines (FDL) in Thenmarachchi region and the islet villages, have fled their homes and have become internally

displaced, following the break out of war on August 11, the GoSL has not directed the officials concerned to take actions to provide them any relief so far.

Instead, verbal directions have been given from Colombo to the officials to refrain from setting up refugee camps and involving in any relief works. As a result, though all the IDPs stay in government schools, no actions have been taken so far to provide them either cooked meals or basic facilities.

In addition, GoSL has allegedly given orders not to disclose the information that the refugees are staying in camps, the Consortium sources further said.

The members of the Consortium also accuse the International NGOs like UNICEF, Save the Children Fund, UNHCR, and ICRC, for failing to expose the malnutrition among children, internal displacement, and starvation.

The Consortium blame INGO's silence on the public attack on the office of Tamil Rehabilitation Organization (TRO), an NGO that is the main relief organization in the entire Northeastern province. Local NGOs fear that their safety is also endangered due to the apparent self-censorship of the INGO's, consortium officials said.

The Consortium officials said that, overall, Colombo has remained detached to the developing humanitarian crisis and has failed to fulfill its humanitarian obligations to people of Jaffna.

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