

## THE NEED FOR MUSLIM INDEPENDENT PARTICIPATION IN THE PEACE TALKS

**(M.I.M. Mohideen)**

At the signing of the Cease Fire Agreement - CFA, Muslim concerns were not looked into. The Muslim community in the East is very seriously affected by the consequences of the CFA particularly by the lawless behaviour that is going on, much of it directed against the Muslim community under the cover of the ceasefire. In fact the CFA has placed the Muslim community at a disadvantage - a position which we did not suffer before the CFA.

LTTE cadres abducted Muslims, killed and burned them in the presence of the Army and Police in the Government controlled territory. This happened during cease fire in Valachchenai on Sunday the 30th June 2002.

Erection of a new military camp during cease fire by the LTTE right inside a Mosque in the Government controlled area in Kurangupanchan in Kinniya is another serious violation of the CFA.

The parties to the ceasefire agreement - GOSL, LTTE, the Norway facilitator and the International Donor countries should realize that even after four years of the cease fire the living condition and the security of the Muslim people in the East continue to deteriorate.

There are a number of events which are occurring in the East which directly affect the Muslim people. Muslim Villages are being threatened, the Muslims have a very clear sense of insecurity and this is leading to unrest among the Muslim youths in those areas who simply cannot understand why the Government is not taking their concerns seriously. They have the feeling that they are being left to the grace and favour of the mercy of the LTTE which as we all know is a heavily armed organisation with a record of atrocities against the Muslim community.

The LTTE Leader of the combat unit of the Eastern province Karuna speaking at a meeting in Switzerland had said that the MoU that was signed by the Government and the LTTE was prepared by the LTTE having only the interest of the Tamils in mind. Speaking further Karuna said the Economy of the Eastern province is in the hands of the Muslims and this should be changed. At present Muslims are taxed only 5% of their incomes, it is only to keep them happy for a while but soon we must levy a Tax of at least 20% from them. Karuna's speech was broadcasted by IBC, a broadcasting station maintained with LTTE sponsorship

Elamparathi who lead the LTTE ethnic cleansing of Muslims in 1990 is now back as the political chief in Jaffna. The main concern of the few Muslims who have returned to Jaffna is about their security, and lack of attention to Muslim IDPs. In 1990 nearly 18,000 Muslims lived in Jaffna in 3537 houses and 194 Government quarters, sent their children to four primary schools and two secondary schools and conducted prayers in 16 Mosques. All that have changed now by the LTTE and the present ground situation in Jaffna is quit different. The few Muslims who have returned, mostly do pavement hawking, tailoring, run meat stalls or engage in scrap iron business. But the LTTE middlemen have now taken control of the trade and it is extremely difficult for the Muslims to survive in Jaffna. Also the Muslim returnees have found that their houses are being occupied by the Tamils authorize by the Government agent on the advice of the LTTE.

LTTE forcibly occupying 63,000 Acres of Agricultural land belonging to 14,872 Muslim Families in the East. During the ethnic cleansing in 1990, LTTE has chased 14,400 Muslim Families from the North, unlawfully occupying 11,100 Muslim Houses a11,058 Acres of Agricultural Land robbed properties worth Rs. 5.0 billion from 13,682 Muslim Families and destroyed 108 Mosques – Muslim places of worship.

After the cease fire, the Muslims have been denied access to mosques during mass agitation promoted by the LTTE. Further, the incidents at Muttur, Kinniya, Valachenai, Eravur, Addalachchenai and Akkaraipattu where the LTTE and other Tamil militarians have destroyed properties worth many Millions and abducted and killed hundreds of Muslims. Muslims in the Eastern Province are the victims of the current cease-fire.

The ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka has had a terrible effect on the Muslims in the North-East. The forcible eviction of more than one hundred thousand Muslims, the attacks on the mosques and other places of worship, the confiscation of land and attacks on innocent civilians have caused fear and insecurity in the hearts of the Muslims. Our primary concern is the safety and security of our people, rights for our areas of historical habitation, resettlement of the displaced Muslims and power sharing on the basis of our right to internal self-determination.

A politico military strategy of the LTTE has been to weaken the economic strength of the Muslim community. In order to realize this object, the LTTE, as is the case of other Tamil militants, have targeted economic ventures and business places of the Muslims.

The pattern of attacks that have been unleashed on the Eastern Muslims clearly demonstrates that there is a deliberate plan by the Tamils to weaken the economic and political strength of the Muslims and chase us away like what they did in the North and make the North-East a mono - ethnic Tamil region in order to create the "Tamil Elam" one day.

Muslims should consider more seriously the present trend and take immediate steps to safeguard our legitimate rights in an appropriate manner. If proper safeguards are not secured now it would amount to be the biggest betrayal of not only the present generation but also those yet to be born in the Eastern provinces as Muslims in the future.

In the last fifty or sixty years, during which Sri Lanka mounted a Constitutional struggle, you will not come across one solitary Muslim voice against the aspiration of the majority people. Muslim representatives did not go before Royal Commission, nor have they 'gone before the International Community with accusation and sought to blacken the image of Sri Lanka government. In fact, if there is one community that could legitimately complain of being discriminated in the field of Education, Land Alienation, Colonisation Safety and Security which come under the purview of the state, it could be the Muslims.

Although the Muslims have not staged a war against the government of Sri Lanka for the settlement of our grievances, we are the worst affected lot in the North East conflict. The Indo-Sri Lanka Accord, the 13th Amendment to the constitution and the provision of the provincial council act have failed to meet the legitimate and reasonable demands of the Muslims. They have failed to protect our lives and properties. They have failed to promote socio-economic interest of our people. They have failed to recognise the different ethnic and political aspiration of the Muslims. This total disregard shown to Muslim sentiments bring to surface one truth - the government has little or no concern about the safety and security of the Muslim people in the North-East.

If this state of affairs is allowed to continue unchecked we will have another looming problem of immense magnitude - that is, the possibility of Muslim youths taking to arms and seeking support from neighboring Muslim countries who will surely not allow their brothers and sisters here to be continuously left disregarded and even undefended. We will then have to face a situation where another dimension of our political problem will become internationalised.

51 States and 22 international organisations represented at Tokyo firmly endorsed the participation of a Muslim delegation at the talks in the context of protecting human rights for all the people affected by the armed conflict. The Government must now clearly indicate without any hesitation whatsoever that it is prepared to stand by the Tokyo Declaration, and has the political will to support that Declaration.

The Muslim community wish to be represented clearly and solely as an independent group on the basis of our own interests whether or not those interests converge with the interests of the Government and the LTTE, We are demanding an independent representation at all negotiations whether it is to discuss Cease Fire Agreement - CFA or Devolution of Power. The Muslims who are directly affected by the ongoing ethnic conflict must be able to choose the composition of our delegation and the line of representations that we wish to advance. It is a matter for the Muslim community to decide among ourselves. There should not be dictation or manipulation by other parties with regard to the composition of the delegation and the position that we might wish to take.

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