
GoSL Denies Reports of Civilian Casualties Caused by Armed Forces Fire

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The Government of Sri Lanka categorically denies reports attributable to sources aligned with or under duress from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) as to supposed civilian casualties in the no-fire zone in north-eastern Sri Lanka. The most recent claim of 378 deaths and over 1,100 injured is founded on a single source – a Government doctor said to be working in the zone. The Government has utterly rejected these claims of civilian casualties being caused by shelling from the security forces on Saturday (09) and Sunday (10). The Government notes that there is no independent verification possible to the tenuous security situation caused by the LTTE's last-ditch attempts to save itself from military annihilation.

The Government's view is that to treat the doctor's statement as evidence of irrefutable and incontrovertible fact, is unwise. It is patently obvious that any story coming out of areas unlawfully occupied by the LTTE does not emanate without the imprimatur of that organization. To treat the statement of any official (albeit one employed by the Government) living under the domination of the LTTE as independent and believable is extremely risky in reaching an objective conclusion on the current situation. The video footage supposedly of the no-fire zone which is attributed to a Tamil pressure group is also of dubious provenance and probative value. Giving credence and acceptance to this LTTE-inspired piece of "news", would wittingly or unwittingly aid the terrorist organization to save itself at the hour of its impending demise. The best guarantee of survival for an organization that is designated a terrorist organization by several right-thinking governments the world over, would be through the generation of shock and outrage at supposed atrocities. The Government feels it is necessary to guard against these coordinated campaigns which seek to vilify the security forces and besmirch their record as they successfully overcome terrorism. It is noted that these exaggerated claims of Government forces firing on civilians in no-fire zones, dramatic casualty figures and charges of indiscriminate attacks have been heightened since January 2009 when the LTTE was pushed back into a rapidly dwindling area. It is this steady stream of LTTE-originated disinformation that has been amplified by its surrogates and acolytes through a extensive worldwide propaganda network enabling the disinformation to be widely disseminated. The Government designated certain areas in which civilians were gathered, as no-fire zones with the intention of safeguarding civilians in keeping with its policy of zero civilian casualties. The Government has, for several months, stated that it is not targeting civilians in these no-fire zones. This position was reiterated by the Sri Lankan Presidential Secretariat in a statement issued on 27 April 2009. The Government went so far as to specifically commit to not using heavy artillery, airpower and area weaponry which could cause civilian casualties. This is a principled stand of a legitimately elected, democratic government of an independent and sovereign nation. The 115,000 civilians who escaped the LTTE, bravely seeking safety while coming under fire and suicide bomb attacks from their former captors, have done so because they are convinced where their safety and security lies. These civilians who have come over to the Government seeking refuge since 20 April, would have hardly done so if they were being indiscriminately being fired upon by the security forces. Indeed these 115,000 persons have made no mention of any instances when they were shelled or otherwise attacked by the security forces. In contrast, it is the LTTE which consistently endangered and attacked civilians it held hostage by locating heavy weapons within these zones and firing at the advancing Sri Lankan armed forces. They also have proved that they are not averse to firing on civilians seeking to flee to safety. They even deployed their signature weapon of terror – the suicide bomb - at civilians seeking safety with Government authorities. In contrast, the Sri Lankan forces have exercised maximum restraint despite suffering increased casualties due to being restricted to the use of small arms and light weaponry. Given the LTTE's track record of brutality against the very people they profess to protect, it is not difficult to surmise as to who is responsible for any civilian casualties that occur in the no-fire zone.

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