
From terror to training

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By Nizla Naizer Department of Technical Education arms over 800 former LTTE combatants with skills and a future; Over 12,000 IDPs in Jaffna empowered as well with vocational training Over 800 former LTTE combatants and 12000 IDPs in Jaffna are to be provided with a new lease of life with training in technical skills provided by the Technical Training Colleges situated in various parts of the country.

The programme conducted by the Ministry of Justice is aimed at rehabilitating and re-integrating former LTTE combatants by providing them with the skills and technical knowledge required to start a new life. Speaking to The Bottom Line, Department of Technical Education and Training Director General Dr. L Obeysekera explained that close to 800 ex-combatants will be provided with the skills in plumbing, welding, electric wiring and aluminum fabrication to name a few. Already close to 108 ex-LTTE combatants have received certificates upon completion of their courses while a further 250 are currently receiving training. Plans are underway to train 500 ex-combatants through a training centre in Vavuniya as well. "The first batch of successfully trained 74 ex-LTTE combatants were sent through a year long training programme at the Pallekelle Centre affiliated to the Kandy Technical College," he explained. The programme at Pallekelle was followed by a new batch of 150 ex-combatants at the Welikanda Centre affiliated to the Polonnaruwa Technical College where 34 certificates were issued to successful trainees and a Thiruppelai Training Centre at Palali affiliated to the Jaffna Technical College for a further 99 ex-combatants. "There will be courses of three months, six months and a year in these centres," Dr. Obeysekera explained, adding that a new training centre will be established in Vavuniya to train close to 500 ex-combatants soon. While plans are underway to provide them with basic IT skills as well, Dr. Obeysekera explained that the most popular courses among the combatants were construction and road construction. Many of the ex-combatants trained by the teams from the Vocational Training Colleges are hardcore cadres, and Dr. Obeysekera explained that the biggest challenge was to change their mindset and win over their trust. "For many of these individuals, war is all they know," he explained, "So it is vital that we give them an environment to settle in and adjust before we start the training." This may take as long as three months, but once they are comfortable with the trainers and trust them, he said the training is smooth and successful. "Hardcore ex-combatants have inflexible minds," Dr. Obeysekera admitted, "But we provide them with the facilities and the environment to nurture and grow. Agricultural training also plays a vital part here. If they can nurture a sprout to a tree, they can manage a family and their life and that is very encouraging." The trained ex-combatants are then taken over by the Justice Ministry with many going abroad in pursuit of jobs and some finding employment here monitored by the Ministry. A certificate ordaining ceremony is to be organised within the week to formally present the fully trained individuals from the Pallekelle centre. "We need to have an integrated approach to deliver on this social requirement and rehabilitate these people," Dr. Obeysekera informed. He also explained that a training programme will be conducted at the Jaffna Training College for the IDPs in the area soon. Already 12000 students have registered for training in 18 vocational areas which include Gem craft and Jewellery making. "The students at the Jaffna College will be provided with basic IT skills, with 2800 specially trained in IT. They will also be trained in all three languages." The programmes for the IDPs will be conducted by the Ministry of Vocational Training and plans are underway to set up training centres in Zone 5 of Menik Farm. "We will set up four centres in Vavuniya, with a capacity to train 120 individuals in one session, with two sessions planned continuously. These will be short term courses." Courtesy: thebottomline.lk