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# The Ultimate Truth as told by Tamil Doctors

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The auditorium of the Media Centre for National Security was teeming with media personnel as more than 70 odd members of the fourth estate, the highest number of them ever to attend a press briefing in recent times, gathered there at the auditorium on Wednesday afternoon. All media personnel had arrived well before the scheduled time, 3 p.m. despite the short notice issued to them in the morning to see the five Tamil doctors namely Dr. Sathyamoorthy, Dr. Ilancheliyan, Dr. Sivapalan, Dr. Shanmugaraja and Dr. Vartharaja.

It was an important event, especially for the international media who were still awaiting to have a clear picture of the situation that prevailed in the No Fire Zone at the last stages of the battle in Puthukudiyiruppu, Puthumattalan and in Mullaivaikkal areas since these doctors were the only link the international media had inside the No Fire Zone at the final stages of the battle. The statements they had made to certain media during the last stages of the battle had given the impression to the international community that thousands of civilians were being killed due to shelling by the Security Forces into the No Fire Zone in violation of the commitment made by the Government not to use heavy calibre weapons considering the safety of the civilians. The statements they were giving were so damaging to the Government and the Security Forces, humanitarian operation to liberate the civilians from the clutches of the LTTE as they were giving exaggerated figures about the civilian deaths and casualties. Ultimately those doctors who were serving inside the No Fire Zone till the end of the battle had to end up their journey in the Government controlled areas along with the thousands of civilians who were flowing into the military controlled areas during the last three days of the battle in Mullaivaikkal. Five doctors Dr. Shanmugaraja &ldquo;The LTTE grabbed major part of the food brought in ICRC shipments for use of their cadres. Civilians did not get them.&rdquo;Dr. Sivapalan &ldquo;They shouldn&rsquo;t have brought the war to the No War Zone. Now LTTE leadership is decimated and people are liberated&rdquo; Dr. Vartharaja &ldquo;Eight times Government sent medical supplies but the people didn&rsquo;t receive them. The problem was that LTTE took medicine from us to treat their injured.&rdquo;

Dr. Ilancheliyan &ldquo;I see no difference between the blood of Tamils and Sinhala. Youth of both communities lose life and limb&rdquo; Pictures by Rukmal GamageDr. Sathyamoorthy &ldquo;The LTTE even quoted us in their websites even without our knowledge and approval to give exaggerated figures about civilian casualties&rdquo; And the five doctors who had arrived in the Government controlled areas were detained by the Security Forces and later handed over to the Criminal Investigation Department for further investigations considering the extent of damage caused to the Government and the Security Forces due to their statements given to certain international media including the BBC about civilian deaths and casualties. On the one hand, the media personnel were keen to learn what had happened there at the last stages of the battle and to have eye witness accounts about the civilian casualties and deaths. On the other hand, the Government was also keen on to give a clear picture about the civilian casualties as the question about the civilian deaths and casualties remained unresolved until this moment. It was during the interview the Hindu editor had with President Mahinda Rajapaksa, the President gave indications that the Government would give a chance for the five doctors under detention to give their version of the story about their experience in the LTTE controlled areas during the final stages of the battle. So, it was an opportunity media personnel were awaiting to grab, at the MCNS auditorium on Wednesday evening armed with their questions to be thrown at the five doctors during the press conference. They were also keen know who was conducting the press briefing and why they had selected the MCNS auditorium as the venue. The purpose of their queries was clear. They wanted to see whether the doctors were under pressure from the Government. The five doctors who were in good health were introduced to the media personnel and were meeting the media not under the pressure. However, many journalists who were concerned whether they were under pressure of the Government to make their statements were not worried to learn whether they were under pressure from the LTTE when issuing their initial statements about the civilian deaths. There was no mention about their plight when they were quoted in their news reports about the situation there in the No Fire Zone when the intense fighting was going on between the Security Forces and the LTTE whilst thousands of civilians were under the detention of the LTTE. However, the doctors were clear when they said that it was under the pressure of the LTTE they had to give those statements to the media exaggerating the number of civilian casualties and deaths. "It was under the pressure of the LTTE we had to give exaggerated numbers of civilian deaths and casualties", the five doctors said in unison. The doctors denied the stories about thousands of civilian deaths as claimed by the United Nations which said that 7,000 civilians were killed during the final stages of the battle to fully defeat the LTTE based on unrevealed sources. They explained how they were pushed by the LTTE to exaggerate figures about civilian deaths when they saw dozens of civilians that got killed in the crossfire. "The LTTE even quoted us in their websites even without our knowledge and approval to give exaggerated figures about civilian casualties", Dr. Sathyamoorthy explained. LTTE controlled areas They simply explained how people were shot dead by the LTTE when they were trying to flee the LTTE controlled areas and the way the people got caught in the explosions of shell loaded trucks by the LTTE. "Their strategy was to keep the civilians around them and survive. That was why they came along with the civilians once Safe Zones were demarcated for the civilians by the Security Forces", Dr. Shanmugaraja said. Since it was a gathering of press personnel too big even for a Spokesman having a regular press briefing, the doctors were little shy in their answers as the pressure from the journalists was little high on them as they were asking many questions at once on different subjects. But they were clear in their answers about the civilian casualty figures that described nearly 700 to 800 civilian deaths during the period from January to May this year which is way off from the figure given by the United Nations quoting the unrevealed sources. Even after the disclosures of these doctors about the civilian casualties the UN stood by its claim as quoted by certain media in their reports. If the UN is so certain about the number of civilian deaths during the final stages of the battle it is now high time for them to come out

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with their evidence to prove their statements without blaming the Government and the Security Forces for causing an unconfirmed number of civilian deaths. The doctors also cleared the picture about the food shortage inside the No Fire Zone saying that it was due to the LTTE taking charge of the food stocks sent by the Government for the use of the civilians. They dismissed as a total lie reports about civilian deaths due to starvation. "The LTTE grabbed major part of food brought in by ICRC shipments for use of their cadres. Civilians did not get them. First we opted to remain in the uncleared area for the sake of our families and other civilians", Dr. Shanmugaraja said. "Eight times the Government sent medical supplies but the people didn't receive them. The problem was that LTTE took medicine from us to treat their injured. They asked us to tell the media that we don't have medicine, There was a shortage of medicine because LTTE took the whole stock," said Dr. Vardharaja. The factor that had to be highlighted here is that all the five doctors had obtained their MBBS degrees from the Medical Faculty of the Jaffna University at different years and had served in Government hospitals. Dr. Sivapalan and Dr. Shanmugaraja were part of the LTTE and had worked with the LTTE. Dr. Sathyamoorthy was the Acting Medical Superintendent of the Kilinochchi hospital. Dr. Vartharaja was the Regional Director of Health Services in the Mullaitivu district whilst Dr. Ilancheliyan was the Medical Officer of Health Mullaitivu. Little nervous Dr. Ilancheliyan was arrested by the LTTE as he was trying to escape from the LTTE controlled areas early this year. Although they were little nervous, in answering the questions thrown at them, they later adjusted to the situation and even talked freely with the journalists at the end as there was no barrier between the journalists and the doctors. "We thought LTTE were liberators of the Tamil people. They forcibly recruit 3 - 4 children and youth from every family. I treated girls and boys of 14 - 15 age group who had been child recruits. It was a useless war. Their strategy was to use civilians as a human shield and to mislead the international community and obtain their support", Dr. Sivapalan who worked with the LTTE for more than a decade said when he was asked to give his message to the Tamil Diaspora. No Fire Zone "They shouldn't have brought the war to the No Fire Zone. Now LTTE leadership is decimated and people are liberated. We hope Government will develop the area and Tamil diaspora should support," Dr. Sivapalan added. "We regret very much for providing false information to foreign media while we were working in the LTTE controlled area due to intense pressure from the LTTE", confessed Dr. Sivapalan. "I had to serve as a surgeon too in the South and the North. I see no difference between the blood of Tamils and Sinhala. Youth of both communities lose life and limb. War is over. All of us should unite to develop the country. I take this opportunity to thank the President and the Security Forces who rescued us. All Sri Lankan youth should unite and work selflessly", appealed Dr. Ilancheliyan conveying his message to the Tamil Diaspora. Now, doors are open for the international community to closely scrutinize the situation and come out with their correct assessment on the situation that prevailed inside the No Fire Zone during the final stages of the battle as the Government has exposed the false information that was disseminated to the international media by the five doctors. Courtesy: Dailynews.lk