

*It's no use saying "We are doing our best". You have got to succeed in doing what is necessary- Winston Churchill*

## SARMY CONTINUES ITS ROLE AS GOOD SAMARITANS, SAY MEDIA

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Belated media reports that attribute to the role of the Army personnel in the tsunami disaster continue to appear in national dailies, unravelling exciting, incredible and humanitarian accounts of agony and destruction.

It is a case in point to show how the history repeats itself. The LTTE many moons ago, regardless of the symbolic and reverential attachment of the saffron-clad Buddhist monks to the Sri Lankan society, went on assassinating forty Buddhist monks at Arantalawa while they were proceeding for a religious assignment. The heinous crime came as a rude and terrible shock to the nation since monk-hood itself is regarded a reflection of religious innocence, if not non-violence.

The Nature, strangely enough made all of us to re-think how the wheel of "Sansara" is at work repeatedly. LTTE at that point of time never wanted civilians resident in that area to collaborate with troops or the Police, nor did they allow villagers to help evacuate scattered bullet-riddled remains of the monks. That history is gone, instead a new history is created out of the tsunami calamity. It certainly highlights the significance of the harmonious co-existence of all ethnicities. Here follows what the English daily, "**Daily Mirror**" (page 9) said on 01st February 2005 and 31st January 2005. (Page 8).

Ven. Hegoda Indasara Nayake Thera was leading a delegation of Buddhist monks along with his 40 student monks when their convoy was attacked by the LTTE at

Aranthalawa, some twenty years ago. But today the very Pirivena temple of the slain monk in Ampara has become a place of refuge for 600 Tamil families who lost almost everything by the deadly tsunami waves.



“These Tamil people came running to the temple asking for shelter hours after the incident and I wasted no time to look into their urgent needs,” says Ven Kirindiwela Somarathana Thera, the Chief Incumbent at the temple and the senior student of the slain Ven Indasara Nayaka Thera.

The Ven. Hegoda Indasara Memorial Hall where all 41 bodies of Buddhist monks were placed two decades ago has today become the temporary home for 600 Tamil families whose meals are prepared by the student – monks themselves.

“I strongly believe that I am honouring my LTTE slain teacher in the best possible manner. Nature has given us an opportunity to practice our respective religions in a more meaningful manner,” says Somarathana Thera.

The Raja Maha Viharaya in Dadayamtenna a border village in Ampara is also no different.

“I immediately got into a lorry and rushed to Kalmunai searching for displaced Tamil families no sooner I first heard of the catastrophe,” said Chief incumbent Ven Chandima Thera. Some 50 Tamil families were housed in the Dana salawa (alms hall) of his temple at the time we visited his temple. “This is the best opportunity to bridge the ethnic communities,” said Ven. Chandima Thera. These border villages had been subjected to random attacks by the LTTE and mistrust between the communities was quite significant. “But, today it is the Sinhala community of this village that looks after the needs of these Tamil families,” Ven. Chandima Thera emphasised.

Similar examples of kindness transcending racial boundaries were heard of in Jaffna, especially in the badly-affected Northern fishing village of Maradankerni.

“It was the Army who saved our lives, and then fed us with their own food,” said Thomas Thavarasa, a refugee at the Puloli Methodist College in Point Pedro.

The urgent measures by the Army soldiers who rushed to the scene from nearby

camps, though Maradankeni is an uncleared area have saved many lives, according to the villagers.

“They shared their meals with us to make sure that we will not die without food. They cleared our church and did everything they could to bring the situation back to normal.” they said.



Another story further highlights the same. It goes on, “ a place where one of the most devastating atrocities was committed during the history of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, had become a symbol of peace and co-existence after the tsunami. Vidyananda Maha Pirivena, the very place where 41 bodies of Buddhist monks killed by the LTTE in 1987 in Aranthalawa, is today the home of around one thousand tsunami victims. Most of the refugees sheltering in the temple are of Tamil origin. As Buddhists, we do not consider race, or religious difference. We helped whoever came here.

We cooked for them. Looked after the injured and helped out in any way we could,” said one of the monks.

“Early in the morning we make milk tea (kiri-te) for everyone. Then we help them out during the day. All the monks in this temple work together,” said another novice monk.

Ven. Kirindiwela Somarathana, the head monk of the Vidyanada Pirivena’s predecessor Ven. Hegoda Sri Indasaara, was one of the victims of the LTTE massacre. Today Ven. Somaratne says, everyone has to learn from life. “The tsunami had taught us a lesson about unity. We managed to make our temple a sanctuary for the Tamil victims. The very hall where the bodies of forty one slain monks were kept had today become a shelter for these helpless Tamil masses.”

“Our novice monks make tea for them in the morning cook meals for them. They carry the disabled to toilets. Everyone works with such dedication. We are making this sacrifice to cultivate a peaceful existence of all,” says the priest. In many places in Ampara, people are struggling to face the reality of what is ahead for them.

Many of the refugees had praise for the police Special Task Force (STF). People say, the officers had been of immense help at a time of difficulty. Karativu area STF Commanding Officer is ASP, B.M Madduma Bandara. He says: “Even I was surprised by

the humanity shown by some of my officers. They worked with compassion. This is a tragedy which affected all of us without race, class or gender. We are all human beings. Many of our officers were empathising with the experiences of these people. This is a tragedy for our motherland for all the people who live in it. Our only priority was to help the victims,” says the STF commander.