

# 50 villagers massacred at Ampara

by Shamindra Ferdinando

Over 50 men, women and children were chopped and cut to death and several seriously wounded by LTTE terrorists in an orgy of violence in three remote hamlets in the Ampara district yesterday, police and government officials in the area said.

With yesterday's killings, the number of combatants, Sinhala and Tamil civilians killed in this week's incidents passed the 300 mark, they said. Military admitted that the massacre had been carried out in retaliation against last week's bombing in the Wannu where 21 Tamils including children died and 40 wounded.

They said about 100 terrorists including women had taken part in Saturday's attacks, the worst since the massacre of 40 Sinhalese at Kallarawa in the Trincomalee district in 1995.

Firearms and grenades had not been used in the attack, sources said adding that personnel attached to the isolated police post situated at Punchedi Sigiya, about two miles away from the stricken hamlet had not intervened.

The majority were massacred at the 31 settlement at Gonagala in the Uhana Divisional Secretariat area, Chandana Wanigasuriya, private secretary to UNP's Digamadulla district MP P. Dayaratne said. Wanigasuriya who visited the scene of the blood bath accompanied by UNP MPs, Dayaratne, Chandradasa Galapathy and Nihal Bakmeewewa, said that all victims had been cut and chopped to death.

At least 47 people including many children and women were killed there, he said. The massacre is the first since 1995 strike on Mangalagama, a village in the Ampara district.

He said he had never seen anything like the Saturday's massacre. Some people and children had been knifed inside their houses, some bodies were under tables.

Of the 47 killed, 14 had died in one house, he said. A group of relatives had come there to participate in a bana preaching ceremony on Saturday to invoke blessings on a person who died in an LTTE terrorist attack three months before. The inmates of the houses and all relatives who had come there for bana and Sunday's dana had been butchered, Wanigasuriya said.

The victims included two pregnant women.

At least six more persons were killed at Pokurugama, Aranthalawa in the Maha Oya police area and at Bendirekka in the Tampitiya area.

The District Medical Officer (DMO) of

Ampara Dr. Dharmaratne Bandara said that three females and two males with serious cut injuries were admitted to the Ampara hospital. Talking to 'The Sunday Island' before he left for the scene to conduct post mortems, Dr. Bandara quoting the driver of the hospital ambulance who transported the wounded people, said that some of the victims had been tied up before they were cut to death.

ICRC Information Officer Harasha Gunawardene said that the Batticaloa based ICRC delegation had left for the scene of the incident.

Wanigasuriya said that at least three groups of attackers had been involved in the attack in the Uhana police area. They appeared to have moved through Tamil villages in the area, he said expressing fears of a massive exodus of people out of the "threatened" area if suitable measures

are not taken immediately.

Some Tamil politicians claimed that the attack was probably to avenge the deaths of 21 Tamils and injuries over 30 people during last Wednesday morning's air strike on Puthukudirippu in the Mullaitivu district.

Wanigasuriya said that about five months ago, the Deputy Defence Minister Anuruddha Ratwatte during a function at a privena at Digamadulla claimed that there were only 25 terrorists in the entire Ampara district and the people have nothing to fear. "See what had happened now", he said.

LTTE killed several thousands of Sinhala and Muslim civilians in the North and the East. However, international pressure prompted the LTTE leadership to cease direct attacks on civilian targets, officials said.