

Volunteers given weapons, but residents leave Ampara villages.
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Volunteers given weapons, but residents leave Ampara villages

By Nilika de Silva

Villagers in the Ampara district have been issued with 2,500 firearms following the massacre of 54 civilians last week — but many people are leaving their villages and seeking refuge in schools.

"We have issued weapons to volunteers in areas that face the LTTE threat. We have got reinforcements from other stations as well," Senior Superintendent D.P.L. Dissanayake said.

He said 250 applications for homeguards had been received, and a crash programme would be held to train these persons. Until then, police personnel got down from other stations would provide security to these villages.

"We will have to depend on the homeguards because they are the only ones who know the terrain," the SSP said. Even when the attack took place, 59 people had been issued with weapons but they did not use them.

However, village officials said the security personnel had not heeded their warnings about attacks. They disregarded the clues given by the people, they said.

These officials said the people were tense in Ampara. Until last week's attack, the people in the town were not affected by the terror, but this time even government officials were leaving their houses and seeking refuge, they said.

"The people who are staying as refugees in the schools, following the attack, have

vided," one official said.

Dr. Deepika Udagama, a member of a Citizens Committee on the Border Villages, said: "The situation is appalling. I was in in Kebithigollewa in the North Central Province and other areas, where there are only homeguards. Whether they can provide sufficient security to the people is the question."

"I object to the term border village," S. L. Gunasekera, a founder member of the Ekiya Sanvidanaya said. "These are endangered villages," he said.

"The accent seems to be on strengthening the security of politicians, not of the civilians of the country," he said. "Now they are taking a travelling circus around the country. Take away security from these tamashas," he said.

The ministers do not need so much security, as the LTTE will guard some of them, he added.

Meanwhile, National Movement Against Terrorism spokesman Champika Ranawaka said the number of civilians killed in the border villages had risen to 3,000 in the 15-year-war, with the numbers forced to leave their homes rising to 90,000.

"In Ampara alone 26 attacks on civilians have resulted in the deaths of 617," Mr. Ranawaka said. "Ethnic cleansing is being carried out and an attempt to destabilise Ampara is being made."

Ampara Government Agent A. H. Wickramaratna told *The Sunday Times* that following Saturday's

Galapitigalla had fled their homes and sought refuge in schools in the Ampara district.

Mr. Wickramaratna said compensation was to be paid to the families of persons killed by the LTTE in the attack. He said Rs. 50,000 would be paid in respect of married persons, while Rs. 25,000 would be paid to the next of kin of unmarried persons above the age of 21, and Rs. 15,000 to those below the age of 21.

Digamadulla UNP MP Yasendra Bakmeewewa said that during the previous regime on the stretch from Junction 69 in Mahaoya to Chenkaladi there were about ten military camps.

But these camps were dismantled and soldiers sent to the north while homeguards were entrusted with the difficult task of providing security, he said.

Even on the night of the attack, the homeguards in the village had gone to protect other areas — a task they willingly do as they are paid an additional Rs. 1,500 for duty outside the village, the MP said. A homeguard is paid Rs. 3,000 a month.

The situation in Ampara is so bad that even if someone is critically ill he cannot be taken out of the village because no route is safe.

Till recently there was a police post on one of the three roads even at night and police patrol doing the rounds till morning. But after their three vehicles were taken away, even these measures

Security beefed-up in city, suburbs



After the recent bus bomb blasts in Chilaw and Negombo, security has been beefed up in the city and