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Maj. Gen. Gerry de Silva;
Tipped to take over as
new Army Chief

Lt. Gen. Cecil Waidyaratne, 3 others on way out

Gerry de Silva



Lt. Gen. Cecil
Waidyaratne:
on his way out

new Army Chief?

by Sirimevan Kasturiarachchi

Army Commander Lt. Gen. Cecil Waidyaratne and three other top-ranking army officials are to retire from service, fueling speculation in political circles, that they had accepted responsibility for the November 11 Pooneryn disaster which left over 700 army and navy personnel including 19 officers killed or missing in action.

President D. B. Wijetunga has already accepted an application for retirement made by the Army Commander on December 3.

Lt. Gen. Cecil Waidyaratne is expected to go on leave prior to retirement on December 15, political sources said.

Meanwhile, Army Chief of Staff, Major General Gerry de Silva who was appointed Director of Operations in the North, in the shake-up of the Security Forces Northern Command structure following the Pooneryn debacle is to

take up duties as acting Commander of the Army.

Major General Gerry de Silva would be elevated to the rank of Lt. General and appointed Commander of the Army on January 1, 1994, these sources said.

Meanwhile Maj. Gen. Lucky Algama, who is the Commander of the 2nd Division is expected to be elevated to the position of Chief of Staff of the Sri Lanka Army with effect from January 1, 1994.

Lt. Gen. Waidyaratne, in his letter offering to retire from service, is learnt to have expressed dissatisfaction over the extension of the service of Chief of Staff Maj. Gen. Gerry de Silva, against his (Lt. Gen. Waidyaratne's) own recommendation.

The Army Commander is also learnt to have stated in his letter that he was not the sole person to be blamed for the Pooneryn disaster. He has pointed out that the other senior officers who exercised the necessary authority in

taking decisions in the North-Eastern war zone should share the blame for not being alert to the situation.

When the LTTE attacked Pooneryn on November 11, Maj. Gen. Rohan Daluwatte served as the Commander of Northern Province while Brig. Jaliya Nammuni, Col. Nishantha Kottegoda served as Commanders of the Jaffna and Kayts respectively.

A Military Court of Inquiry appointed by the Army Commander is now investigating the November 11 attack at Pooneryn by the LTTE.

The government is expected to review the positions of the three other senior Army officials after the Court release its report.

Government is learnt to have offered to appoint Lt. Gen. Cecil Waidyaratne as Sri Lanka's Ambassador in Italy. But according to sources the outgoing army chief has not yet made his response known to this offer.