

Meeting with Muttur People on 18th August 2008

Objective: The meeting was to discuss problems of Muttur Muslims in the context of current political and administrative changes that have taken place after the PC elections:

At the opening remarks it was stated that their problems are not only just the general human rights violations that has been talked about much after the liberation of east, but it has direct connection to the geographical importance, specially the location of their native-places. Denial of their right to livelihood, security and free access to agricultural and graze-land has been the attempt of the government to control the minority communities' existence there. It was also stated that there have been a government and military aided effort to move Sinhalese to these areas. There have been preferential treatments which have been considered part of the incentive to encourage Sinhalese to settle down permanently in newly cleared east. The whole issues and problem faced with natives of Muttur have been seen as something that is coming out of government's Sinhalisation program of the East.

Issues that were discussed in details:

High security zone in the sea has become a permanent problem for the Muttur community. Currently about 3000 families are being affected. 40% of the population has been engaged in fishing. High security zone in the sea has been highlighted as single most burning issue that has impacted the local economy negatively.

Traditionally Muttur community was depended on either fishing or agriculture for their livelihood and with all these government restrictions on land and sea after liberation poverty has become rampant. This destitution has not only brought about lot of cultural problems but also has forced young women to seek employment abroad in large numbers. There has been an erosion of cultural values and education among the youth

It was also highlighted that the 2km sea access against 200km deep see fishing and the time restriction (6am to 5pm) against night fishing are government's deliberate attempts to drive away the native fisher folks (Tamils and Muslims) from the coastal belt in order secure the harbour and to establish a tourist zone. It was pointed out that due to this high security zone restriction in the sea, 02 fishing DS are highly affected (Kinniya , Muttur, within muttur electrate).Both, HSZ of 2 km restriction and 6 am to 5pm time limit, have had huge impact on the local fishing industry and without deep sea fishing and night fishing muttur fisher folks who used to send at least 3 to 4 lorry loads of fish daily to Colombo is dependant on the outside market for their own consumption of fish now.

In the Muttur Bay area, natives have noticed that Sinhala fishermen undertaking deep sea fishing with the permission of SL navy. Since the harbour is located in the Muttur bay deep sea fishing got banned after the eastern battle (August 2006). However just before this year's PC election, a special order was given by Basil Rajapaksa to allow Muslims to undertake deep sea fishing only on the condition that the muslims vote for his party. Nevertheless Muslim from Muttur did not vote for the party in power and next day after the release of the election result, the fishing restriction has been imposed back by the Navy. However Sinhalese from Trincomalee have been allowed in the bay to fish . Even Sinhala fishermen from Negambo with their Multi day boats have been seen engaging in

deep sea fishing in the Bay areas whereas the Muslims being allowed to use only the vessels which does not operate on an engine.

From Muttur to Kinniya on the A 15 road 06 Muslims villages have been controlled by LTTE and after the liberation, reentry to these areas have been restricted and people were not even allowed to visit their areas once. However now the jungles have been cleared and land have been divided to built 500 house in this area. It was told that Tamil farmers from Sampoor, ChennaiUur and Kattaiparichan will be moved. However Tamils have refused to move due to limited availability of fertile land for agriculture in this area. Muslims fear that these 500 houses will be given to Sinhalese .

Fishing in lagoons: Maha Weli, Uppu Aru and 15th Channel river are also controlled by army and natives are not allowed to fish. Out of total fishing community 35% of them used to engage in lagoon fishing as well.

Yet another sector severely affected is the cultivation, apart from the high security zone restriction. Villagers who engage in chenna cultivation have become the target of the military. Farmers and fisher men have been shot dead when they enter into restricted areas.

Road that connects Muttur and Kinniya has been neglected for long and transportation has become difficult. Prices of basic consumer items have gone high due to the difficulty in transportation.

On a discussion related to the new PC administration and devolution, many discrimination in the form of appointing government official for administration has been highlighted. They felt the Muslim community has two-fold discrimination now. Prior to the PC election it was only the Sinhala domination through Trico civil administration however now after the PC election Tamil officers have been appointed for high civil admin post in Muslim majority areas which in many instances has resulted some form of favoritism towards Tamil community. Example : In Mutur DS division which is predominantly a Muslim town two Muslim DSs have been harassed and then transferred by the Trinco GA in the last one year and a Tamil DS from Kuchchaweli has been appointed recently. Already this particular DS has a reputation of discriminating the Muslims of Kuchchaweli who are 60% of it's population. .

Isolation of Pullmodai natives:

It was stated by the Pullmudai civil society members that the natives from Pollmudai can't travel to any areas without an entry /exit permit from the area commander. Like wise outsiders are also not allowed to enter Pullmudai freely. This entry/exit pass system has prevented humanitarian organizations and civil administrative officers getting access to Pullmodai. In the last two years, it has had no access to any form of development. Pollmudai is 54 km from Trincomalee and 24 miles from Mullaitheevu and the military says these restrictions are due to it close approximately to tiger controlled area. It was also pointed out that Kokkilai, a predominantly Sinhala village, is only 17 miles away from Mulliatheevu and does not have any of these restrictions. Kokkilai fishermen are allowed to undertake deep sea fishing with navy protection. It was also stated that

Pullmudai comes under Anuradhapura police administration and basically now the civil administration comes under the military.

Pullmudai has 3287 Muslim families and 26 Tamil families. there are some sinhala families resettled within the Illmanight depository. Pollumudai fishermen also have the same restriction as Muttur fisher folks.

Pullmudai civil society members pointed out that there is a clear differential treatment between Kokkilai Sinhalese and Pollmudai Muslims when comes to access to sea and freedom of movement. There is also some form of curtail on trading. People from Pullmudai are not allowed to take their produces out side. Through this entry and exit permit military only allows people to move in a limited way but no goods can be transported from Pullmudai. This stops any produce from Pullmudai getting to outside market where as Sinhalese from near by villages are allowed to bring in their produce and sell them in pullmudai. The civil society members further stressed that it is government's deliberate strategy to evict the natives (Muslims and Tamils) from pullmudai in order to control the Illmanite depository. Divisional secretariat officers of Kuchchevali who are in charge of Pullmudai civil administration have to get prior permit from the military to enter Pullmudai (this applies to NGOs as well), therefore no civil administration or development activities take place.

Other points raised:

- Recently there have been some moves of developing Ellakanthai and Lanka Pattuna. Kali Kadal area also has seen some colonization move.
- In Thopur and Lanka Pattuna (Illankai Thurimuham) Muslims have lost 3500 and 1500 acres of farm land respectively due to HSZ restriction.