

Mass exodus from Wann. (1999, November 14) *The Sunday times.*

Mass exodus from Wann



A family from the war zone village of Welioya fleeing their village and home following reports that the village had come within the reach of LTTE fire-power. Pic by Genu Wellege

Civil administration collapses, looters move in

Leon Berenger and Chris Kamalendran in Vavuniya and Padaviya report

The northern town of Vavuniya became a ghost town yesterday after almost the entirety of its population fled from all sides of the ethnic divide following threats from the separatist LTTE.

Civil administration has collapsed with the closure of schools, banks, hospitals and state institutions while traders who were not taking any chances have put up shutters and moved out to safer areas.

Those opting to remain in this jittery town are mainly families who have adopted a 'come what may' attitude and

have chosen to ride their luck as the guns of war loom nearby. Among them are refugees displaced in earlier fighting. They have no place to go since they possess no exit passes issued by the authorities.

While a majority of the Tamil population sought refuge in safe areas such as Mannar, Madhu, Trincomalee, Batticaloa, several hill stations and the capital Colombo, the Sinhalese and Muslims fled to areas in Anuradhapura, Medawachiya, Puttalam and Kalmunai.

As the exodus continued, the presence of state officials was rarely visible, with most of them reported to have fled

as well.

The government hospital in the heart of Vavuniya town had already emptied all its patients, and from a total of 37 doctors only four remained to look after emergency cases.

The patients were earlier transferred to Chettikulam with the assistance of the French Nobel prize winning volunteer group, Medicin Sans Frontiers, together with local Red Cross and other officials.

Leading private companies were yesterday sending their executives to Vavuniya to assist the local agents to remove the goods to safer areas in the south.

The mass exodus began on

Wednesday after the clandestine LTTE radio, 'Voice of the Tigers,' put out a bulletin hinting that it would strike the town with long-range artillery fire.

But there were others to gain from this miserable plight of those fleeing.

In nearby Medawachiya, unscrupulous vehicle owners were charging huge fees to transport those fleeing along with their goods.

Many eager to flee the area were charged something like Rs. 10,000 for the ride from Vavuniya to Medawachiya, which under normal circumstances would not cost even Rs. 2000 for the 15-mile journey.

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No time even to pass out

by our Minneriya correspondent

A batch of 64 army recruits with (censored) the military camp in Minneriya piled into two trucks heading for the battlefield.

They were an eager lot of village lads and were proud to serve their motherland in the various military units, ranging from infantry, ordnance and signals, assigned to them. They were scheduled to pass out at a ceremonial parade on November 19.

However, on Thursday morning, they were given just enough time to write to their families and friends, who had been invited by them to see them pass out, saying that the parade was cancelled and that they were heading for Vavuniya. They were informed that the ceremonial parade had been postponed indefinitely and they took the news in good spirit. According to some of the recruits, their training was intense. (censored). The other recruits who joined the army (censored) batch and attached to other training camps have also been sent to the front from Monday.

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