

Ghost faxes and Tiger warning. (1999, November 14). *The Sunday times.*

Ghost faxes and Tiger warning

The busy hub of Vavuniya town was almost like a ghost town. The streets were deserted, the shops were shut. A few traders who remained were loading their goods into lorries to be transported away. People were fleeing their homes. Some went on foot carrying a few belongings in bags while others rode on lorries, vans or tractors loaded with their household belongings.

The checkpoint three kilometers away from the town was crowded with people lining up to get their passes. Lorries filled with hardware, building material, plastic goods, bicycles, foodstuffs and other miscellaneous items were also at the checkpoint. Fear was in the air.

The reason for their flight was a warning from the LTTE to leave certain areas of Vavuniya. Some residents said a fax was circulated with this warning, while others said it was announced over the clandestine Tiger radio. People have been leaving Vavuniya since Wednesday, a policeman at the checkpoint said. "They say the fax is from the LTTE, but how do we know who sent it. Our authorities have not made any statement. They have not told the



Vavuniya: A ghost town

people to go or to stay."

Three young women at the checkpoint were not sure where they were going to. "We will stay in a village somewhere and come back in a day or two to see what is happening," one of them said. "We cannot carry all our household stuff. We had to leave everything behind. We do not know how much of it will remain

when we come back." Many of the traders and other residents who were leaving feared that their shops or houses would be looted.

Contrary to some reports received, the army are not preventing anyone from leaving Vavuniya. Those who had permanent passes were able to go out without a problem. Others were given a pass

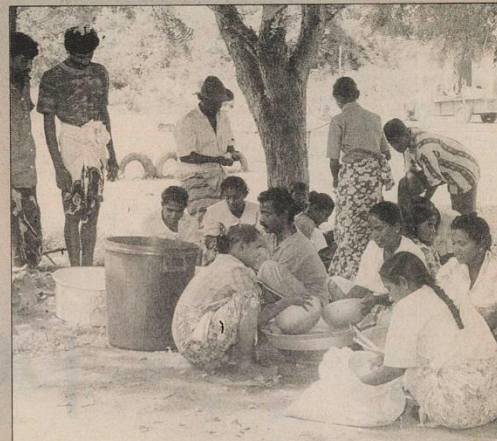
on producing the National Identity Card. Only those who had no identity card faced a problem in obtaining a pass. One resident who came for passes with two sons and a daughter faced such a problem since one of the youths did not have an identity card. Passes were only issued to three of them. He had to return with some proof of identity for his other son.

Military spokesman Sunil Tennekoon said the LTTE had issued a statement, which created a fear psychosis. He said the Army had not stopped anyone from leaving. However, they have told the people that the protection was there and they should not worry. Although most of the people in the town have left, the villagers are still there. "We have been enhancing security," Brig. Tennekoon said. "The army has regrouped itself to face any threat."

Bo Schack, a representative of the United Nations High



A businessman loading goods to be taken out of Vavuniya



Refugees in makeshift camps at Padaviya

Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in Vavuniya said that in the LTTE warning certain areas including Northern and of Central Vavuniya had been singled out as possible danger zones. "We are ex-

remely concerned about the situation of the civilians," Mr. Schack said. "It is a serious humanitarian problem. We are concerned about those who have left Vavuniya without passes. We have requested the

Police to permit them to stay for some time." The ICRC delegates too continue to work in Vavuniya, following civilian movements and addressing their needs.

Safeguard civilians in war zone

By Shelani de Silva

Bishop of Mannar Ravappu Joseph has appealed to the Government and the LTTE not to harm civilians after thousands of civilians in Vavuniya fled the area last week.

Bishop Joseph told The Sunday Times that innocent civilians are caught between the Government troops and the LTTE.

"No one is doing anything for their welfare. The town is deserted. The people are helpless they are just taking off, it is time that both parties did something to spare the people. I appeal to the Government and the LTTE", the Bishop said.

The Bishop added that on previous occasions too he had appealed. Defence Minister Anurudha Ratwatte to safeguard the civilians.

"This is not the first time, but this time more than 300 000 civilians have left their homes in fear of attacks. What is the Government doing? No authority is taking any action. I will decide on further action next week" he said. Meanwhile by Friday afternoon the ICRC moved in to assist the thousands of displaced civilians in Padaviya and Vavuniya.

ICRC spokespersons told The Sunday Times that they had appealed to the Government and the LTTE not to harm civilians.

"We cannot order any party but we keep reminding both the LTTE and the Government that in a war situation civilians should be safeguarded. This is what we are doing after civilians in Vavuniya fled. We have our officers in the area and they have already commenced humanitarian work," he said.



Empty wards at Vavuniya hospital