

Pooneryn not in Tiger hands: PM

5.11.93

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe asserted yesterday that the Pooneryn army camp in the North has not fallen into enemy hands. However, fighting was still going on in the security forces-held territory.

Security forces, he said, had suffered heavy casualties and lost arms and ammunition to the enemy. But the LTTE too had counted the highest number of dead since the battle at Elephant Pass.

"The LTTE has already lost 409 cadres according to a Tiger radio communication monitored by the army. Meanwhile a Defence Ministry report has said that the LTTE death toll is over 500," he disclosed.

Addressing the UNP executive meeting at Sirikotha, Mr. Wickremesinghe quoted Col. Rohan Silva now commanding the artillery in the battleground as saying that there were many bodies of the fallen Tigers littered on the ground opposite his camp.

Paying a glowing tribute to security personnel now in action, the Prime Minister said: "Fighters of our armed forces are not the kind that run away. They have dug in and are giving a good account of themselves."

He said that our security personnel

who had faced the brunt of terrorism for 10 years were seasoned fighters who could remain unmoved in both victory and defeat.

"Let us all give our armed forces in action our unstinted moral support at this juncture. This is not the hour to engage ourselves in futile criticisms, personal vendetta and arguments. Our bounden duty is strengthen our security forces by deed and word. Stock-taking, fault finding and argumentation are things that can wait. Let critics blame this person or that or the government once this battle is over. Let us in the meantime close our ranks to give our moral backing to the security personnel locked in battle in the North," he said.

Mr. Wickremesinghe who commended security personnel in action for their gallantry, also conveyed condolences to the families of the fallen heroes.

The Prime Minister who earlier said that the country was facing a decisive moment added. "We are gathered here at a moment when our security personnel are fighting the enemy in the army-held territory in Pooneryn described as located at the doorstep of LTTE leader Prabhakaran."