

THE ISLAND

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Pooneryn debacle

Cecil takes full responsibility

by Sirimevan Kasthuriarachchi

"I decided to quit my post after taking sole responsibility for the November 11 security forces debacle at Pooneryn" the retiring Army Commander, Lt. Gen. Cecil Waidyaratne said.

He said he had to accept responsibility for all the losses suffered by the security forces when the LTTE attacked the Pooneryn camp.

"In this LTTE assault the Navy lost at least 200 of its men, twelve five zero anti-aircraft guns and the radar equipment, and I had to take responsibility for all these losses", Lt. Gen. Waidyaratne declared.

Explaining his decision to retire from the Army, he said he had made up his mind that he should quit on the third day of the attack on Pooneryn.

"I was directing the combined operation to regain control of the Pooneryn army complex. I was at Palaly air force base. I was told that the LTTE had captured a T-55 main battle tank. That was the time I decided to quit" the out-going Army chief said.

Lt. Gen. Waidyaratne said he was once the Commander of the Armoured Corps before he took over as Army Chief. The loss of this battle tank at Pooneryn was a personal insult to him as he, at one time led the Armoured Corps of the Army.

He said he made his decision to step down known to high ranking armed services officials at Palaly and later at the Security Committee meeting held in Vavuniya at which

the Service Commanders and the Defence Secretary were present.

Lt. Gen. Waidyaratne said that the government extended the service of Major General Gerry de Silva, who was Chief of Staff of the Army. He said he had recommended against the extension of service of Maj. Gen. Gerry de Silva, but the government disregarded it. "This too was a contributory factor to my decision to retire," he said.

He also explained the difficulty of working with a man, who would continue to be the Second in Command of the Army, after opposing the extension of his service.

He said that he had issued 17 directives to the North-East Army Commands following the LTTE raid on Janakapura in Welioya. If the officers followed these instructions the November 11 attack could have been easily averted, he asserted.

He said that the Provincial Commanders, the District Commanders, local battalion leaders and the Commanding Officers of the camps were responsible for carrying out instructions issued from the military high command.

He said that he as Army Commander appointed a Military Court to inquire into the circumstances of the LTTE attack on Pooneryn and this Military Court had been requested to report whether those responsible for carrying out orders had done so.

He said he would report to the Defence Ministry the findings of this Military Court of Inquiry.

Merger not in the best interests of Sinhalese, Muslims and Tamils — SLPC

by Zacki Jabbar

The first convention of the Sri Lanka People's Congress held recently unanimously agreed that the merger of the North-East be done by the parties to the Indo-Lanka Accord namely, the President of Sri Lanka and if necessary the Prime Minister of India.

The resolution further said the merger need not be decided by call-

ing on the people who were not parties to the Accord to express their view at a referendum since the North-East was merged without the consent of the people.

The convention also unanimously decided that the merger of the North and East is not in the best interests of the Sinhalese or Muslims of Sri Lanka or the Tamils living outside the Northern Province.

A second resolution

passed unanimously called on the authorities to provide nearly half a million refugees presently languishing in refugee camps owing to terrorist activities with alternate lands at the earliest so that they may start a new life.

The resolution also refers to the plight of the people who were driven out of Jaffna by the terrorist and are also languishing in refugee camps with no

hope of returning to their homes.

The SLPC in a third resolution while extending its support and appreciation to the members of the security forces who are valiantly fighting terrorism in this country, called upon the Government and all those concerned to make a serious and sincere effort in finding a lasting solution to the burning ethnic problem in this country.