

Top UN official fails to meet Tamil, Muslim parties

A top UN official who was in Sri Lanka to study the worsening ethnic conflict in the island went back Tuesday without meeting leaders of the Tamil and Muslim minorities.

UN Assistant Secretary for Political Affairs Angela Kane met ministers, officials, and leaders of a radical Sinhalese political party, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), but avoided the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), two of the biggest political parties of the minorities.

She did not meet the Civil Monitoring Commission (CMC) that keeps a watch on human rights violations, particularly in multi-ethnic Colombo.

Reacting angrily, head of the CMC and MP Mano Ganeshan said that it was highly iniquitous on the part of the UN official to have met the JVP and avoided the parties of the minorities.

He told IANS that while the minorities were the victims of the on-going war, the JVP, as an avowed representative of the majority Sinhalese, was goading the Mahinda Rajapaksa government to keep fighting the Tamils and not talk about devolving power to them before the war was over.

'I do believe that she was wanting to meet us, but she was prevented from doing so by the government,' Ganeshan charged.

He said that Kane called him up before leaving the country and apologised, saying that her programme had been tight. But he told her that it was very regrettable that she should have met a communal party like JVP, and not the Tamils and the Muslims.

Kane's visit had got 'too politicised', Ganeshan said.

Asked for his comments, TNA leader R. Sampanthan said he would not like to be drawn into any controversy, as the Kane mission was 'highly delicate'.

The UN official, who had come as the special representative of the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, following trenchant international criticism of the Sri Lankan government's handling of the human rights violations in the island, had a lot of tightrope walking to do, political circles said.

On the one hand, the Sri Lankan government had convincing arguments in favour of an aggressive posture in its war against the terrorism of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), but on the other, there were rights violations that could not be overlooked.

Kane had been briefed about the Sri Lankan situation by the UN agencies before she came here, and therefore, there was little new that she could have learnt by meeting the 'victims', political circles said.

Her real mission was not to gather information anew but to give a powerful message to the Sri Lankan government, said a Tamil source who did not want to be identified.

'We learn that the UN secretary general had wanted her to convey a message to the Sri Lankan

leadership, which she did,' the source said.

Kane visited Batticaloa, where the military operations in 2006 and 2007 had displaced about 250,000 people. But she did not visit the northern district of Jaffna and the rebel held Wann.

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