

Govt. Frees 41 Tiger Suspects. (1993, July 15). *The Observer*.

• We were misled, says rehabilitated LTTE youth

GOVT. FREES 41 TIGER SUSPECTS

By Panduka Senanayake

FORTY ONE Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) suspects, arrested in military operations in the North and East, were freed by the government yesterday.

They were the first batch of Tamil youths to be released after rehabilitation by the government. Two more batches are under rehabilitation currently.

Mr. Nanda Mathew, Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports, who was the Chief Guest at the releasing ceremony at the National Youth Service Council's Auditorium in Maharagama, had a message for the released men and their relatives, to take back.

He wanted them to tell the LTTE that their release was unconditional and that the Tigers too should release all their captives unconditionally.

Thirty four Sinhalese including 33 policemen and a soldier are knowingly being held captive by the LTTE currently in Jaffna.

Brigadier Ananda Weerasekera, Commissioner-General of Rehabilitation also requested them to tell the people of the North and the LTTE about their unconditional release and to get the Tigers to reciprocate in a similar manner.

One of the released youths who addressed the gathering said that earlier, he, like many other youths in the peninsula, did not really know about their Sinhala brothers and sisters in the South other than what they had heard from the propagandists. However, he had first hand experience of them during his four months period of rehabilitation and his earlier misgivings were proved wrong, he said.

He thanked Brigadier Weerasekera, for having accepted them for rehabilitation without any fear or misgivings.

"We should be united and live peacefully," he said adding that he would be taking that message with him to the North.

The 41 youths, arrested about two years ago in military operations in Jaffna, Mannar, Batticaloa and Trin-

comalee had been languishing in prisons in Colombo prior to their rehabilitation.

"They were brought to us in Pallekele, from the Magazine prison in chains," said a rehabilitation official. He said that the Sinhala youth who were under rehabilitation in Pallekele at the time greeted them with banners of welcome and a sheaf of betel in the traditional manner.

"Today they walk away as free men and with the training we have given them, they can earn a livelihood," he said.

The released men, mostly from the coastal areas were trained in fishing and maintenance of fishing gear, wood work, lathe work, sewing and other crafts. They were also taught music and languages and 12 of them who did not know how to write in Tamil were corresponding with their loved ones in Tamil towards the end of the rehabilitation period, officials said.

For yesterday's release, the parents, wives and relatives of the young men were brought down from the north and east and even from refugee camps in India with the assistance of the ICRC, officials said.

The ICRC which had kept the lines of communication open for the former detainees by helping them to correspond with their families in the north had also helped some of them to trace their relatives who had been uprooted in the civil strife.