

Suspected Tigers among boat people? SL High Commissioner to Indonesia expresses suspicion

By Dianne Silva

A number of LTTE cadres, including some high profile Tiger operatives, are suspected to be among the 78 Sri Lankan boat people off the coast of Pinang, Indonesia, the Sri Lankan High Commissioner to Indonesia Maj. Gen Nandana Mallawarachchi said.

The High Commissioner said he had already identified a number of cadres among asylum seekers and believed that a number of high profile LTTE operatives could be among them. "I have identified some LTTE cadres, but cannot confirm their ranks at this time. I suspect a number of high profile LTTE cadres to be among these asylum seekers," Mr.

Mallawarachchi said. The Sri Lankan High Commissioner said he had come to this conclusion by examining photographs of those on board the vessel. When contacted, the Indonesian Foreign Ministry was unable to confirm details of those onboard the vessel as they were yet to process them.

The persons are now refusing to disembark the vessel. "These people don't want to get off the boat and are comfortable onboard as they are being provided with food and other essential needs," Mr. Mallawarachchi explained.

NZ rules out taking Sri Lankan asylum seekers

Wellington - New Zealand ruled out yesterday taking any of the 78 Sri Lankan asylum seekers on board the Australian Customs ship Oceanic Viking off Indonesia.

Confirming that Australia had raised the question with the government, Immigration Minister Jonathan Coleman said, 'We're wary of rewarding actions that seek to jump the queue for entry to New Zealand.'

Three weeks after being picked up from a sinking boat, the asylum seekers, who were heading for Australia, are refusing to go ashore and be processed at an Indonesia detention centre. Indonesia has said the Oceanic Viking must leave its waters by Friday. 'There are literally thousands of displaced people across the Asia-Pacific region,' Coleman said. 'The New Zealand government does not believe that an ad-hoc approach to dealing with individual cases like the Oceanic Viking will send the right message. 'Sending the wrong message won't help solve similar situations that may arise in the future.'

Coleman said the government believed the best approach for dealing with the wider issue of people smuggling and boat people was through the Bali Process, a multilateral arrangement signed by New Zealand, Australia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and 39 other countries in the Asia-Pacific.

He said the broader issues were not going to go away and the Bali Process emphasized prevention, interception and deterrence. (Asia-Pacific News)

