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Disturbing information has come to light that soldiers in civilian attire were responsible for shooting passengers and crew of a private bus going from Mannar to Colombo on Monday April 23rd at Chettikulam.

Seven persons comprising the driver, conductor and five passengers were killed and a further thirty seven injured in the incident.

The private bus named "Kapilan" had left Mannar for Colombo at about 9.00 pm fully packed with passengers. The bus was going along the Mannar - Medawachiya road when a claymore mine went off.

The incident occurred near Manik farm in the Chettikulam area about 125 metres away from where an army detachment was stationed.

The bus was hit but the driver managed to drive the tottering vehicle several yards forward and then stopped.

Evan as passengers both Tamil and Muslim were shouting in panic a gang of armed men in civilian clothing boarded the vehicle and sprayed it with bullets.

The bus driver, conductor and five passengers including an engineer were killed in the incident. A further thirty seven were seriously injured.

The assassins had then gone off in the direction of the security forces camp.

While some people were injured in the landmine attack most of the victims received injuries in the shooting. The deaths too were due to shooting.

Though news reports said all victims were a result of the claymore mine explosion there is now information available that the shooting caused most damage.

Given the proximity of the security camp and eye - witness reports that the assassins had walked towards the camp instead of fleeing soldiers in civil are suspected of being responsible for both the landmine and subsequent shooting.

The act was in revenge for a landmine attack by the LTTE on a bus plying between Mannar and Vavuniya on April 7th. Several passengers , Tamil and Muslim, were killed and injured in the attack.

A contingent of soldiers on the bus were also victimised. One died and six were injured.

Meanwhile the Mannar citizens committee has written to President Rajapakse asking him to ensure civilian safety and also initiate an investigation into both incidents on April 7th and 23rd.

The text of the appeal is given below:

"We the members of the Mannar Citizens' Committee are compelled by circumstances beyond our control to appeal to your Honor in particular and the conscience of the world community in general about the recent brutal killings perpetrated on the helpless and defenseless bus passengers traveling from Mannar to Vavuniya on 7th of April as well as Mannar to Colombo on 23rd April 2007.

It is an accepted axiom among the civilized nations of the world that any government worthy of its name should take all measures to protect the lives and properties of its subjects.

Under such desperate and dangerous circumstances the innocent and defenseless citizens of Sri Lanka are left with no alternative, but to appeal to your Excellency for timely intervention and assistance.

May we take the liberty of spotlighting the two recent merciless attacks on the buses packed with passengers by unknown persons within the fully tight security areas of the Sri Lankan security forces.

The attack was perpetrated at 7.45am on the CTB bus which left for Vavuniya from Mannar at 6.00am on 7th of April 2007 in the broad daylight. The claymore explosive fitted on to a tree was detonated by some unknown persons in the absolutely controlled area along Kannaty - Piramanalankulam road in the broad daylight.

In this dastardly act of brutality, seven innocent civilians including the driver of the bus and an army soldier were killed on the spot. In addition 25 passengers were wounded and taken to Vavuniya and Anuradhapura hospitals for treatment.

On the 23rd of April 2007 at about 11.30 pm a gruesome attack was perpetrated on a private bus named "Kabilan" which left Mannar at 9.00 pm fully packed with passengers. The incident took place along Mannar - Madawachchiya road near Manik-Farm. The bus which was hit by a claymore explosion dragged on for a short distance and came to an abrupt halt. According to some survived passengers some unknown armed persons got in to the bus and immediately started firing at random on the passengers who were pitifully crying for help. In this merciless firing 6 persons inclusive of the driver and the conductor of the bus were killed and 37 passengers were wounded.

Both these gruesome incidents had taken place in the controlled areas of the Security Forces.

The people who undertake long night bus journeys rely on the protection of the security forces.

In the above the circumstances our categorical demands are:-

1. To appoint a commission of inquiry into the killings concerned with the two above attacks. The culprits whoever they may be should be identified and brought before law and meted with due punishment.

2. To bring an immediate end to these types of human rights violations, extra judicial killings and extortions which also have raised their ugly heads in the district in the recent past.

To take action to see that the government in power in Sri Lanka takes adequate measures to safe-guard the lives of the innocent passengers who solely
To take action to see that the government in power in Sri Lanka takes adequate measures to safeguard the lives of the innocent passengers who solely rely on the protection at the government for their safety and security.

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