

Canada suspects Tamil Tigers on board ship

August 14, 2010

VANCOUVER: The Canadian Navy and coast guard have boarded a cargo ship carrying 490 Tamil asylum seekers, including some passengers the Canadian government believes may be Tamil Tigers.

Reports said the ship was originally intended to go to Australia.

Canada's Public Safety Minister, Vic Toews, said that some of the passengers were "suspected human smugglers and terrorists".

Many Tamils in Canada, however, rejected assertions that the passengers were linked to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the militant group that had been fighting for a Tamil homeland in Sri Lanka until it was defeated by the military last year. Canada has regarded the Tamil Tigers as a terrorist group since 2006.

The government has been preparing tents on seaside military facilities to house people from the ship, and jails have been warned they could receive new inmates.

"A vessel carrying 490 individuals claiming refugee status - including suspected human smugglers and terrorists - entered our waters and the Canadian government is taking action," Mr Toews said. "Human smugglers and human traffickers are now watching Canada's response to judge whether or not they can continue to take advantage of us."

The MV Sun Sea reportedly approached Australia a few months ago but was turned away or those in control feared it would not be allowed to dock. The Canadian government is worried that more ships are on their way.

Canada is home to about 300,000 Tamils, the largest population of Tamils outside Sri Lanka and India.

Last October, a ship carrying 76 asylum-seekers was intercepted in Canadian waters after crossing the Pacific from Sri Lanka. The group on board the Ocean Lady said they were fleeing persecution.

All of the men were immediately detained in jails around the Vancouver area, but most were let go within weeks, and months later only one remained in custody on suspicion of being a Tiger. He was released this year.

Chitrangane Wagiswara, Sri Lanka's high commissioner to Canada, said Canada should not accept the latest arrivals' claims for refugee status because they were part of a human smuggling operation linked to the Tigers.

Legal aid officials have called in immigration lawyers to act for the migrants and members of the Canadian Tamil Congress were travelling to British Columbia to offer help. A local hospital had set aside a special area for those requiring medical attention.

Agencies

Top World articles

1. [Couple stoned to death for adultery](#)
2. ['Miracle' as plane hit by lightning splits into three](#)

3. [Schapelle Corby, Renae Lawrence given five-month sentence cuts](#)
4. [Weird way to get a big buzz](#)
5. [Florentine furore over who owns David](#)
6. [More World articles](#)