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HOME
Sunday, 1 March 2009

- OBSERVER ONLINE
- News
- Editorial
- Business
- Features
- Political
- Security
- Review
- Sports
- World
- Panorama
- Junior
- Letters
- Obituaries

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

- OTHER LINKS
- Marriage Proposals
- Classifieds
- GOVERNMENT GAZETTE

Marriage Proposals

Classifieds

GOVERNMENT GAZETTE

SHARE MARKET | EXCHANGE RATE | TRADING | PICTURE GALLERY | ARCHIVES

LTTE confined to underground bunkers



by Ranil WIJAYAPALA

Exactly after two and half years of fighting since the Mavilaru operation the Security Forces have been able to confine the LTTE, the most ruthless terror outfit in the world to underground bunkers located in Puthukudiyiruppu, the last township under their control with troops successfully confining them to an area less than 50 square kilometres as of yesterday.

With no sign of surrendering to the Security Forces even at the last leg of the battle, the LTTE is seemingly getting ready to make those underground

bunkers their own graveyards as troops are fast moving into the centre of the Puthukudiyiruppu town despite heavy resistance of the LTTE.

The LTTE is fighting tooth and nail in defending their final stronghold, seemingly expecting a miracle to happen even at the last moment before their certain defeat at the hands of the Security Forces.

The troops are witnessing the fiercest battles they have ever faced in the battle front these days in Puthukudiyiruppu, as LTTE is exerting maximum pressure on them making use of their maximum fire power with their limited manpower available with them along with their top level leaders including Velupillai Prabhakaran who are still surviving inside underground bunkers.



Troops searching for bunkers in Puthukudiyiruppu. Pix by Rukmak Gamage

Military intelligence

Military intelligence and foreign intelligence services have confirmed that the Tiger leader has sent his wife Madiyathanee and his younger son to an unknown destination in a foreign country last month and he is still remaining in the country along with his elder son Charles Anthony to direct last minute operations to avoid their certain defeat.

According to military intelligence, the LTTE is now left with only less than 600 cadres to fight against the advancing troops and another 100 cadres to provide security for their leader, Prabhakaran. The only advantage they are having at this moment is heavy fire power and more than a 70,000 odd civilian population trapped there in the no fire zone in the coastal belt in the North of Mullaitivu.

But it is now a battle to defend not their territory, but the remaining top Tiger leaders now trapped in Puthukudiyiruppu and Iranapalai areas as they have lost even the last escape route at this moment as each and every inch of land is under aerial surveillance of the Security Forces round the clock making all their moves within this limited territory untenable.

Desperate

Marriage Proposals

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They are still making desperate attempts to break the Security Forces defences South of Puthukudiyiruppu and enter the jungle patches in Oddusudan and Mullaitivu in order to launch attacks on the Security Forces to paralyse the attempt to defeat them in their final township.

It was amidst the huge pressure exerted on them by the 58 Division under the command of Brigadier Shaveendra Silva pushing the LTTE cadres in a North to South direction and West to East direction that fierce battles erupted in the outskirts of Puthukudiyiruppu town which covers an area more than 16 square kilometres.

The huge pressure exerted by the 58 Division on them has brought positive results within past week enabling the troops to enter Puthukudiyiruppu town area as of Tuesday (February 24) and continue this pressure for the past few days amidst strong resistance from the LTTE.

Scores of Tiger cadres were killed in the battles and troops also suffered heavy casualties as they made use of maximum fire power when advancing.

The LTTE, which is now in a defensive position, has the advantage of the human shield they have created with a massive number of civilians restricting the use of fire power by the Security Forces against them.

That is the great benefit the LTTE is now enjoying at the last leg of the battle as they take cover of the civilians trapped there. The Sri Lanka Air Force also has to restrict their air attacks against the LTTE in view of the safety of the civilians entrapped in Puthukudiyiruppu East. However, the Tiger outfit has now realized the grave danger they are facing in the final battle with the Security Forces as LTTE second in command and Intelligence Wing leader Pottu Amman himself has stated to the command the Tiger cadres in the battlefield.

His voice has been heard for the first time in the battlefield through radio communications intercepted by the 58 Division troops on Wednesday evening as fierce fighting continued in that terrain in their bid to prevent the troops entering the centre of Puthukudiyiruppu.



Troops clamping down on LTTE hideouts

The Tiger leader has vowed not to allow troops to enter Puthukudiyiruppu junction which is being heavily defended by the LTTE. The 53 Division, under the command of Brigadier Kamal Gunaratne and Task Force VIII under the command of Colonel G. V. Ravipriya, are pushing the LTTE from the south of Puthukudiyiruppu to enter the junction from the south. Now the 53 Division is just 300 metres away from the vital Puthukudiyiruppu junction. With these advances another battle formation engaged in Vanni liberation operations has been grounded as the areas they have to operate are fast shrinking. As of yesterday Task Force IV which operated under the command of

Colonel Nishantha Wanniarachchi grounded its operations having reached Puthukudiyiruppu South. The Task Force IV commenced its operations from South of Nedunkerni in December 2008 and captured Oddusudan and the Oddusudan Puthukudiyiruppu road.

Huge earth bunds

According to ground sources the LTTE is strongly holding the town after constructing huge earth bunds covering the town area and resisting the 53 Division and Task Force VIII entering the junction. However, troops of the 58 Division, Task Force IV, Task Force

VIII and 53 Divisions have made tactical moves and overcame these obstacles in their march towards Puthukudiyiruppu.

Even on Friday and Saturday morning the LTTE tried to breach the defences in Puthukudiyiruppu South launching hours long attacks on the troops operating there. But troops have not allowed them to breach any of these defences.

Battleground sources told this correspondent that there were many untold stories about the sacrifices made by the valiant troops in their bid to avoid Tigers infiltrating the Security Forces defences.

A soldier, attached to the Special Forces, made the supreme sacrifice this week in his bid to capture a Tiger bunker in Puthukudiyiruppu South.

This soldier had jumped into a Tiger bunker exploding a hand grenade in his hand after he was shot by a Tiger cadre. The troops have been able to capture the bunker as the four Tiger cadres there were killed inside that bunker once he jumped into it exploding the hand grenade.

There are many other untold stories of these troops during their gallant march towards the final victory against the LTTE.

These supreme sacrifices in defending their motherland are quite unlike the sacrifices of Tiger suicide cadres who have been brainwashed to achieve the targets given by their leaders. Amidst this situation the LTTE is also trying their best to breach the Security Forces defences in Mullaitivu especially in the West of Nanthikadal lagoon after inducting their cadres into the jungle patches in Oddusudan and Mullaitivu.

It was on February 01, 2009 four days ahead of the Independence Day celebrations that the LTTE launched a massive counter attack on the Security Forces operating west of Mullaitivu and South of Puthukudiyiruppu.

That was the biggest counter attack the LTTE launched during the two and half - year long Eelam War IV, as they made use of four explosive laden vehicles to breach the Security Forces defences on February 03 compelling the troops to readjust their defence lines.

It was after that effort the Security Forces strengthened their defences South of Puthukudiyiruppu expecting another wave of attacks and conducted massive mop up operations in the Oddusudan and Puthukudiyiruppu South jungles in search of the Tiger cadres that may have infiltrated into the area.

The 59 Division troops operating in the Mullaitivu West were able to kill 14 such Tiger cadres. Troops also believe a number of other Tiger cadres are still operating in these jungle patches in order to launch isolated attacks on vital military installations in the Mullaitivu and Puthukudiyiruppu South areas.

Oversee

Army Commander Lt. General Sarath Fonseka has appointed Brigadier Chagi Gallage to oversee the operational matters in Mullaitivu area and also take speedy measures to strengthen the second and third defence lines West of Mullaitivu and South of Puthukudiyiruppu.

Since troops could not take full control of the Nanthikadal lagoon the LTTE is making maximum use of the lagoon to launch counter attacks on the advancing troops. However, the Security Forces are well prepared to face such counter attacks by the LTTE at the last moment deploying additional troops into the area.

It is quite possible that the LTTE would launch a sea and ground attack on the troops operating South of Puthukudiyiruppu once troops launch the final assault to capture this key town.

Investigations

Meanwhile, the Sri Lanka Air Force, which was able to destroy the two Tiger aircraft which were on two suicide missions targeting Air Force Headquarters in Colombo and Katunayake Air Force Base, are conducting further investigations into the incident. The Defence Ministry has sought assistance of the Embassy of the Czech Republic based in

New Delhi to ascertain how LTTE had acquired the two Sling Z 143 light aircraft manufactured in the Czech Republic. The Defence attaché of the Czech Embassy in India has given an assurance to the Government to conduct a detailed inquiry in this regard by its Secret Police to ascertain as to how the LTTE came to be in possession of the aircraft.

Revealed

The SLAF investigations have also revealed that the LTTE pilots had not used any night vision equipment to operate the aircraft in reaching Colombo and Katunayake.

Therefore, it is strongly believed that the pilots had been guided from the ground making use of communication equipment or via telephone. Although the Air Force managed to destroy the two Tiger aircraft, intelligence reports say that the LTTE is in possession of two more micro light type aircraft with them. Although these small size aircraft has no capability to fly a long distance it has the capacity to reach at least towards Vavuniya to launch an attack.

The Security Forces strongly believe that the LTTE may use these two aircraft also against the Security Forces at any moment at least to boost their morale and give a strong message to the international community about their capability.

In addition to these aircraft, the LTTE is also reportedly in possession of another small helicopter. This has been first used by the LTTE in 1996 during a religious ceremony at Vatrpalai Amman Kovil West of Mullaitivu.

Recoveries

The recoveries made by the 58 Division in Puthukudiyiruppu West, recently also indicate that the LTTE was in possession of two Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) with them. Investigations have revealed that the burnt sketch of the aircraft found in that area was that of a UAV. Military intelligence reports indicate that the LTTE had brought down those UAVs from Europe during the peace negotiations they had during the Ranil Wickremesinghe administration. However, the Sri Lanka Air Force which has expanded its air defence system over the past two to three years, is confident of facing the challenge of these LTTE aircraft effectively.

The recoveries made by the Security Forces in Oddusudan, Visuamadu and West of Mullaitivu very clearly indicates how LTTE was preparing for a massive terror operation unparalleled anywhere in the world. The Ceasefire Agreement signed between Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran has given ample opportunities for the LTTE to prepare for such massive operations with the aim of even extending their territories even to the southern part of the country.

If such an opportunity was given to the LTTE by extending that Ceasefire further, the LTTE would have posed a major threat not only to the sovereignty of Sri Lanka but also to other sovereign nations across the globe as it was the only terror outfit equipped with air and naval capabilities.

Therefore, it is up to those who are trying to give oxygen to the LTTE at the time they are breathing the last to decide whether they are actually supporting or opposing global effort of combating terrorism in the name of humanitarian issues. Under these circumstances the Security Forces have given serious thought to accelerating the process of liberating the civilian population trapped there in Puthumattalan area within the next few days.

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