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Sunday, 15 March 2009

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## Troops hands tied due to human shield - Army Chief

Shanika Sriyananda

While the LTTE is getting hemmed in to a mere 30-square km land in the North, the Army Chief, Lt. Gen. Sarath Fonseka said that his troops were ordered to give priority for the safety of the civilians though the troops are facing many constraints to attack terrorists, as they are still getting the cover of the human shield.

According to Gen. Fonseka, the LTTE is using an area four km south of Puthumathalam, the safe zone - as a launching pad where their heavy weapons and artillery guns are positioned amidst civilians.

"Though they attack us while mingling with civilians the troops can not hit back. No artillery were fired towards these areas. The troops have to face many constraints when they fire at the LTTE", he said.

In their `final kill', the troops of the 59 Division is pushing the LTTE from Mullaitivu, 58 Division from North of Puthukkudiyiruppu, 55 Division from the north of Puthumathalam, 53 Division from the west of Puthukkudiyiruppu and Task Force-8 from the west of the lagoon. The LTTE is now left with a coastal stretch of 15 square kms (skms) and the mainland with another 15 skms.

He said that the LTTE was now deploying civilians at FDLs and last week over thousands of civilians with basic training were sent to fight the advancing troops. " But bearing the risk we give maximum safety for the civilians, even though they come at nights", he said.

The Army Chief said if the troops advanced just another two kilometres from the present FDLs, the LTTE's domination would be basically confined to the coastal belt soon.

"The coming days will be very crucial for the LTTE. Everyday there are lots of casualties and deaths", he said adding that the front line has now extended from Northern edge of Puthumathalam to North of Puthukkudiyiruppu, and to the Western edge of Mullaitivu lagoon.

He also said that the LTTE was still trying to re-capture their former bases but warned that LTTE's such attempts to counteract the military offensives would be disastrous for them", he said.

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**LP**

**Peace Process of**

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