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HOME

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OBSERVER
ONLINE

News

Editorial

Business

Features

Political

Security

Review

Sports

World

Panorama

Junior

Letters

Obituaries

OTHER
PUBLICATIONS

OTHER LINKS

Marriage
Proposals

Classifieds

GOVERNMENT
GAZETTE

Forces outsmart LTTE

THWART LTTE ATTEMPTS TO REACH DEFENCES:

Ranil WIJAYAPALA



Pic: Reuters

Last week there was growing international concern about the Sri Lankan situation, especially about the plight of the civilians trapped inside the Safe Zone demarcated by the government for the safety of the civilians, as Security Forces were approaching the borders of the No Fire Zone (NPZ) from all fronts.

Many have expressed their fears that the civilians trapped inside the NPZ would be in grave danger once the Security Forces reach its outer perimeter where the LTTE is forcibly holding more than 60,000 civilians as a human shield.

The concerns of the international community has led to a proposal to take up the matter at the UN Security Council (UNSC) Session but it was opposed by two permanent members of the UNSC, China and Russia citing that it is an internal matter of Sri Lanka.

However, discussions took place at an informal level about the Sri Lankan situation due to the growing concern about the plight of the civilians. Therefore, possibilities are very high to take up the matter of civilians trapped inside the NFZ at the UN Security

Council in the coming weeks.

The fact that should be highlighted is that the international community is much concerned about the civilians trapped inside the last terrain held by the LTTE. They have forgotten the fact that those civilians have been kept hostage by the LTTE for the past two years.

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Comments and suggestions to : Web Editor

The LTTE kept them hostage once the Security Forces began this humanitarian operation from Madhu area in the Vanni in February 2007.

Since then they pushed back all the civilians in all liberated areas in the Vanni towards areas under their control.

The LTTE continued this practice as they were aware that there is no survival for them once civilians flee from their territory. They were preparing for their final battle for the past two and half years pushing those civilians from one township to the other.

Those innocent civilians had no other option but to follow the orders of the LTTE as they used to keep at least one member from each family with the Tiger outfit. The Security Forces and the government brought this fact before the international community over and over again but pressures were put on the Government and the Security Forces who are acting within a democratic framework to defeat a terror organization.

Many international organisations opted to work in an area controlled by the LTTE rather than working with a democratically elected government and its machinery which has so far proven to be the most effective in providing relief to the displaced civilians.

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When the government was proposing that those civilians should be treated after evacuating them to cleared areas these so-called INGOs insisted that they should be given access to serve the civilians in the same area they were living. By doing so they not only fed the Tiger outfit but also encouraged them to keep the civilians under their detention further.

If not for that situation those civilians would have escaped from the Tiger grip much before they were confined to a small terrain which can be easily kept under the surveillance of the LTTE continuously.

Therefore, those international bodies should equally share the responsibility of putting these innocent civilians in grave danger. If these INGOs encouraged these civilians to flee the areas under Tiger control at the initial stages the situation would have been a completely different one today.

Mainly, they did not expect the LTTE to face such a defeat at the hands of the Security Forces and they did not expect such a fast momentum in the

battlefront. Many of them thought that the Security Forces might stop their military campaign once they capture five key townships Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu, Pooneryn, Paranthan and Elephant Pass, which were under the control of the LTTE.

If Security Forces stopped their march towards the capturing the last inch of land under LTTE they would have completely underestimated the capabilities of the LTTE as more than 75 per cent of their military assets were recovered after the Security Forces continued their military operations towards the East of A-9 road.

The LTTE from the beginning tried to concentrate on displaced civilian settlements surrounding their High Security Zones as it was the only way of keeping their military assets intact. But none of their plans worked as Security Forces continued their march overcoming all the obstacles they have faced on their way towards reaching the final goal.

So the Security Forces are now at the threshold of their final victory as they are fighting within the last one and half square kilometres in Puthukudiyiruppu and Iranapalai the last township held by the LTTE outside the NFZ.

Inevitably the fighting raging in Puthukudiyiruppu is fierce and it might be the most fierce battle fought by the Security Forces in the past two and half decades. The LTTE, even though they know their defeat is within sight they cannot give up the battle as all the second level leadership of the LTTE is already trapped inside this small terrain.

According to battlefield sources the LTTE is engaged in a delaying game at this point of time as they are constructing earth bunds on daily basis to make obstacles for the Security Forces marching on to the last terrain held by them.

The brunt of the final battle in Iranapalai has been taken by the 58 Division under the command of Brigadier Shavendra Silva and they are advancing towards the lagoon front capturing each and every earth bund the LTTE had created to obstruct them while 53 Division under the command of Major General Kamal Gunaratne is also heading towards the boundary of the NFZ along the A-35 road.

Worrying factor

The most worrying factor for the LTTE at this point is that most of the land routes leading to the NFZ are under the control of the Security Forces leaving them with only a single link with NFZ through the lagoon.

The LTTE made yet another desperate attempt last week too to push back the troops from the Iranapalai area as they have blocked two main roads leading to the NFZ. It was in the early hours of Wednesday, that hundreds of Tiger cadres launched a surprise attack on the 58 Division defences in Iranapalai East compelling the troops dominating the area to readjust their defences and face the threat effectively.

The initial assault was on the 7 Sinha Regiment and the 8 Gajaba Regiment troops. Few bunkers of the 7 SR troops fell under Tiger control and troops took immediate measures to establish a U shape defence line to prevent Tiger cadres infiltrating into the cleared areas.

Brigadier Shavendra Silva who was on leave in Colombo rushed to the scene as the Army feared that it was also a major counter attack by the LTTE similar to the counter attack it launched from March 4

to 8 North of Puthukudiyiruppu.

Army Commander Lt. General Sarath Fonseka personally instructed the field commanders to take the situation immediately under control as there were possibilities for the LTTE cadres to infiltrate into the Security Forces controlled areas.

High risk



Civilian woman carries a belongings.

But the high risk situation was immediately controlled by inducting 14 Gajaba Regiment troops to assist the 7 SR troops and to recapture the defence line taken by the Tiger cadres.

Fierce fighting continued till Wednesday afternoon and 58 Division troops managed to capture the bunker line that was captured by the LTTE.

Commando troops were also deployed to the area in support of the infantry troops who searched the area to detect if any Tiger cadres who have infiltrated into the area.

However, the LTTE made yet another attempt to launch a massive assault on the 58 Division defences after assaulting the 20 Gajaba Regiment troops in the afternoon.

But that counter attack too was completely foiled by the 20 Gajaba Regiment troops taking the situation fully under control by Wednesday

evening.

Scores of Tiger cadres were reportedly killed including four middle level Tiger leaders and a large number of weapons were recovered by the troops during the search operations carried out by the 58 Division troops.

Foiled

As the 58 Division defences came under LTTE attack the 53 Division defence line too came under LTTE attack and it was effectively foiled after re-capturing the two bunkers captured by the LTTE during the first assault.

There was a strong indication that the LTTE has been little bit weakened after their major counter attacks from March 4 to 8 in Ampalavanpokkanai area as they were beaten back by the 58 Division troops with the support of the Commando troops and Special Forces troops killing more than 200 Tiger cadres.

But one cannot underestimate their capability to launch massive attacks on the Security Forces who are now inching towards the borders of the NFZ because the LTTE is still keeping a considerable number of well trained cadres with the Sea Tiger leader Soosai and with other second level leaders including that of Pottu Amman to provide personal security for these second level leaders and also to Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran who is now in hiding inside an unknown corner of the NFZ.

The other key factor is that the LTTE is continuously engaged in recruiting civilians into the outfit after providing them with basic weapon training. The LTTE even at this moment can overpower the manpower strength of the Security Forces if they force all the civilian trapped inside the NFZ to the battlefield after providing them with weapons.

The LTTE has enough weapon stocks and ammunition to provide each and every civilian with weapons though they are not equipped with food stocks to feed them. And they are ruthless enough to force those civilians into the battlefield pointing guns at their heads.

At the same time the LTTE is left with their second level leadership including Pottu Amman, Soosai, Bhanu, Theepan, Lakshman, Vithusha, Lawrence who have groomed this Tiger outfit to such a ruthless level for the past two and half decades.

It was with that idea in mind the Security forces are making their way into the borders of the NFZ strengthening their man power to suit any eventuality and liberate the civilians one by one after filtering them from the Tiger cadres.

So far the Security Force, for any reason, have not shown any interest to speed up their operations to capture the remaining territory of the LTTE or to step into the NFZ as they are aware of the reprisal attacks from the LTTE if they take any hasty decision.

What the Security Forces want to see at this point is not a chaotic situation but a well planned military operation to liberate the remaining civilian population trapped there inside the NFZ. They proved their bona fides in the East by liberating nearly 20,000 civilians trapped inside Vakara from the clutches of the LTTE without harming a single civilian there.

Used brains

The Security Forces used not their fire power but their brains and hearts to liberate the civilians. This time too they are ready to do that though the situation is much more challenging than at Vakarai.

It is more challenging as they have to capture the remaining leaders of the LTTE including Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran who is reportedly living inside the NFZ waiting till the last moment to flee the country deploying flotillas of suicide boats into the sea or mingling with the fleeing civilians.

The missiles fired at the Air Force aircraft was a strong indication that the Tiger leader is safely living inside the NFZ as the Air Force strongly believes that the missile attack was due to activating of an Air Defence System. Therefore, the Security Forces will have to face all these challenges in the coming days in their march towards liberating the final territory of the LTTE.

Therefore, it is premature for the international community who are looking at this scenario only from their own angle to intervene in this humanitarian operations and mess up the whole effort taken by the Security Forces for the past two and half decades pressurizing the Security Forces to pause military operations to enable the civilians to flee from the Tiger grip. They should act wisely taking into account that more than 58,000 people have arrived in Security Forces controlled areas amidst all those obstacles. They should not leave any room for any international player to give oxygen to the LTTE at this last moment as such efforts by the international community would display their double standards in combating global terrorism.

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