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LTTE CONFINED TO NO FIRE ZONE:

Troops encircle over 200 Tigers

RANIL Wijayapala

The entire Puthukudiyiruppu township and Iranapalai area came under Security Forces control last evening with 58 Division troops and 53 Division troops surrounding the last terrain controlled by the LTTE in the North East of Puthukudiyiruppu after capturing Pachchapulmudai junction the last supply route connected to the No Fire Zone from the mainland under 58 Division troops control.

A senior military official told the Daily News that fierce fighting raged North East of Puthukudiyiruppu as 58 Division and 53 Division troops surrounded the last square kilometer stretch under LTTE after 58 Division advanced from the North to South and 53 Division moved in a south to north direction.

The troops of the 11 Sri Lanka Light Infantry Regiment attached to the 58 Division under the command of Brigadier Shavendra Silva and the 5 Vijayaba Infantry Regiment attached to the 53 Division under the command of Major General Kamal Gunaratne linked up, south of Pachchapulmudai junction encircling hundreds of Tiger cadres inside.

"We believe that more than 200 Tiger cadres were trapped inside this terrain and troops are conducting search operations in search of them," the official added.

Fierce battles are expected to rage in this terrain as possibilities are high for the LTTE to launch counter attacks to rescue the Tiger cadres trapped inside, officials added. The 58 Division troops took control of Pachchapulmudai junction on the Puthukudiyiruppu Ampalavanpokkanai Road the last supply route linked to the No Fire Zone after a fierce battle with the LTTE. The LTTE used this supply route to send reinforcements to the Puthukudiyiruppu area through the lagoon that separates the No Fire Zone from the mainland.

Earlier the 58 Division troops captured and cut off the Puthukudiyiruppu-Puthumattalan road and another road leading to Ampalavanpokkanai from the North of Iranapalai.

The Task Force 8 troops operating under the command of Colonel G.V. RaviPriya cut off the links the LTTE had to Puthukudiyiruppu through the A-35 road.

During the search operations conducted in the area yesterday the 58 Division troops found 19 bodies of Tiger cadres along with their personal weapons and large stocks of arms and ammunition and vehicles left behind by the fleeing cadres.

The 53 Division troops also found 13 bodies of Tiger cadres, eight personal weapons and other military equipment belonging to the LTTE during the search operations conducted yesterday.

With these moves by the 58 and 53 Divisions the LTTE has been confined to the No Fire Zone alone with thousands of civilian detained by them.

The 55 Division under the command of Brigadier Prasanna Silva is also heading towards the northern edge of the No Fire Zone after capturing the fifth earth bund created by the LTTE.

"Troops on the Vanni liberation operation are now at its most decisive phase as they are poised to rescue the civilians trapped inside the No Fire Zone", a military official added.

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