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Troops encircle No Fire Zone

FORCES POISED FOR CIVILIAN RESCUE:



The three decade prolonged conflict in the North and East yesterday reached its climax as the Security Forces were able to confine the LTTE, the most ruthless terror outfit in the world into a narrow stretch of 20 square kilometres in the North of Mullaitivu which has been demarcated for the civilians trapped inside the conflict affected zone.

The LTTE which has been propagating all over the world through the LTTE dominated media network to convince the Tamil Diaspora across the globe that they would fight back at any time to reverse the military victories, will have to accept the bitter truth that at last they have been defeated by the military as they lost control of the entire Puthukudiyiruppu and Iranapalai area by yesterday afternoon.

What is left to them is to retreat and hide among the Tamil civilians still kept under their detention in Puthumattalan, Ampalavanpokkanai, Palamattalan, Valayamadam, Vellmullivaikkal and Kariyamullivaikkal areas inside the No Fire Zone (NFZ).

Military manoeuvre

But there is no guarantee period for their safety inside the No Fire Zone since with the sympathy of the civilians the Security Forces are determined to liberate each inch of land in the North to ensure that there will be no LTTE influence anywhere in the North and East.

The LTTE had to face this pathetic situation suddenly, at the last leg of the battle outside No Fire Zone as the Security Forces made a surprise move on Wednesday encircling more than one square kilometre territory in which the LTTE was fighting heavily with the 58 Division troops.

It may be for the first time in the three decade long North East conflict that the ground troops practised this military manoeuvre which may have been in military books for centuries.

What is more special in this move is that the Security Forces were able to capture an area, where LTTE will have to fight for more than three weeks posing stiff resistance to the Forces within just two three days move by the 58 Division and the 53 Division together.

The intensity of the war that was going on for the past few weeks in Puthukudiyiruppu and Iranapalai would have proved the toughness of the battle there as the LTTE was engaged in a do or die battle to defend each inch of land in Puthukudiyiruppu from the advancing troops.

Troops of the 11 Sri Lanka Light Infantry Regiment and the 20 Gajaba Regiment attached to the 58 Division under the command of Brigadier Shavendra Silva made the move from the Northern direction, from the Puthumattalan lagoon remain.

Comments and suggestions to : Web Editor

Fierce fighting

They came across the lagoon stretch which is some two kilometres East of the front lines where fierce fighting was going on between the 58 Division troops and the LTTE.

Whilst the 58 Division troops were moving from the North to South direction the 53 Division troops made a South to North move from the A-35 road to link up with the 58 Division troops.

Brigadier Chagi Gallage commanded the troops as the Acting Commander of the 53 Division during the operation and Major General Kamal Gunaratne who was on leave joined the operation on Thursday.

The 11 SLLI troops under the command of Lt. Colonel Kithsiri Ekanayake made a surprise move to Pachchapulmudai junction on the Puthukudiyiruppu Ampalavanpokkanai road the last supply route connected to the Tiger defence line from the No Fire Zone by Wednesday afternoon completely cutting off LTTE links between the No Fire Zone and the Forward Defences.

Fierce fighting erupted in this terrain as many Tiger leaders attempted to flee from the area in double cabs and other vehicles.

Those vehicles were attacked from all directions by the ground troops killing a number of Tiger cadres.

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With the capture of the Pachchapulmudai junction the 11 SLLI troops linked up with the 5 Vijayaba Infantry Regiment troops in the south of Pachchapulmudai junction completing the mission of encircling more than one square kilometre terrain which was strongly held by the LTTE with the intention of dragging on the war for another several weeks.

Intercepted radio communication of the LTTE indicated that the top level leadership of the LTTE was aware of the move by the Security Forces at the last moment and have slipped away from the area even without informing the Tiger cadres trapped inside this terrain.

There was information that Bhanu and Lawrence who were commanding the Tiger cadres have escaped from the area a few minutes before troops encircled the area but have not informed the situation to the ground level cadres.

There was no communication between the Tiger cadres trapped inside and the Tiger leaders operating from the No Fire Zone during Wednesday night. But there were some attempts by Tiger cadres to escape from the trap they have been caught up.

Mislead them

Even on Thursday morning fierce fighting raged between the Tiger cadres trapped inside this terrain and the troops of the 58 Division engaged in search and clear operations inside the area encircled by the 58 and 53 Division troops.



Civilians arriving in the cleared areas Picture by Rukmal Gamage

Tiger cadres continued with their fight as they were not aware what was happening behind them as their leaders continue to mislead them saying that they would bring in reinforcements and enough ammunition stocks to continue their fighting.

The most pathetic situation is that the LTTE leadership is still trying to mislead not only the Tamil Diaspora but also the Tiger cadres as they are aware of the fact that they cannot keep the Tiger cadres with them to fight the war against the Security Forces if they give them the correct picture.

Under these circumstances the Tiger cadres trapped inside this narrow stretch had to commit suicide themselves once troops reached each and every bunker they were manning inside.

With these moves the LTTE has now been confined to the No Fire Zone as they are left with a bare land infested with shrubs and paddy fields. Therefore, troops of the 58 Division and the 53 Division are poised to reach the borders of No Fire Zone very soon as these two Divisions are operating respectively 400 metres and two kilometres distance from the No Fire Zone.

As these two Divisions the 58 and 53 Division along with the Task Force 8 under the command of Colonel G.V. Ravipriya are making these from the West of the No Fire Zone the 55 Division under the command of Brigadier Prasanna Silva also have reached some 1.5 Km North of the No Fire Zone having captured five earth bunds created by the LTTE to stop their advance.

The 553 Brigade under the command of Lt. Colonel Mahinda Weerasuriya commenced the operation to capture the fifth earth bund of the LTTE on the narrow stretch of land in Thevavetti in the North of Puthumattalan.

It was on March 28 that the troops attached to 7 Vijayaba Infantry Regiment under the command of Lt. Colonel Deepal Pussella started the operation from the beach front and the lagoon front to advance towards the Tiger earth bund.

As they start the move to advance on the LTTE terrain, the troops of the 4 Gemunu Watch battalion through their powerful binoculars, observed that Sea Tigers were launching two boats from the No Fire Zone area.

As LTTE was trying to launch boats the 55 Division troops took prompt action to launch a missile attack on the boat movement. It was at 5.50 am in the morning troops fired the first missile to disturb the boat movement. After disturbing the Tiger boat movement the 7 Vijayaba Infantry Regiment troops started their move towards the Tiger earth bund.

Armoured tanks gave them close support firing the Tiger earth bund from the Western edge. Within two hours the 7 VIR troops were able to capture the earth bund of the LTTE in Puthumattalan.

As the troops were consolidating their positions in the newly captured earth bund the 55 Division troops once again observed another five Tiger boats moving towards the area. With the detection of the Tiger boat movement troops took immediate steps to fire another Pakistan made, laser guided missile towards the Tiger boats. It was at 4.50 p.m. the 55 Division troops fired the second missile during that day. Due to that missile attack one Tiger boat was completely destroyed.

However, Sea Tigers continue to launch their boats into the sea as they were aware that the 55 Division troops were also fast advancing from the No Fire Zone from the Northern direction.

During the night also they launched some boats into the sea and reached the sea off Chalai and Chundikulam areas. That prompted the Sri Lanka Navy to launch their Fast Attack Craft to engage with the Tiger boats. In one such assault a Tiger boat got damaged.

Desperate moves

Intercepted radio transmissions confirmed that, Sea Tiger leader Maran was either killed or wounded in the Sea battle and they were given instruction to drag the boat back to their base along with Maran.

One sailor was killed and another Navy officer was injured during this sea battle in the sea off Chundikulam.

These attempts by the LTTE very clearly indicate that the Tiger leadership is making desperate moves to come out of this terrible situation as they do not see any room given by the Government for any international interference into this situation. The Government especially Human Rights Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe and Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama are engaged in an aggressive campaign to change the attitude of the international community towards the Sri Lankan situation.

Therefore, many moves by the LTTE backed organizations to interfere in the Sri Lankan situation failed at many international forums including at the Security Council of the United Nations.

The Government openly argued its case at all international forums where some disgruntled elements tried to implicate a bad picture about the Sri Lankan situation. Many international organizations have realized the fact that it was the LTTE which was behind the move to feed false information to the international community.

The international community can learn the correct attitude of the Tamil civilians towards the LTTE fleeing from the No Fire Zone if they also can go through the agonizing experience they had with the LTTE.

Civilian fury

The correct attitude about the LTTE was once again witnessed on March 28 when a batch of civilians escaped from the Tiger grip arrived at a welfare centre in Vavuniya. According to military officials who had witnessed this incident, once these civilians got down from the bus, the number of civilians started to assault a man accusing him of plundering their children from their families.

The entire crowd inside the bus started to assault this person cursing him for taking away their children and forcibly recruiting them into the LTTE. Later it was found that the man being assaulted by the crowd was a LTTE Policeman who had worked at Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu as a LTTE Policeman.

Nadaraja Kumar (38) from Peliyagoda had joined the LTTE during his excursions into Kilinochchi during peace time. He has been entrusted to arrest deserters and children fleeing from the LTTE training programmes.

He has also been responsible for forcible recruitment of children to the LTTE. It was due to the recruiting of children and family members to the LTTE many civilians could not reach the Government controlled areas as they were reluctant to leave their children with the LTTE.

Since they have no right to express their opposition to the LTTE, they waited until the moment they reached the cleared areas to assault the Tiger Policeman who had grabbed their children from them. It very clearly shows that the people were suppressed very badly by the LTTE after denying them the right to express their opposition to any move by the LTTE.

It is incumbent on the Security Forces to liberate them from the Tiger grip to ensure that those civilians also enjoy the same rights like other civilian populations in the country.

Therefore, the Security Forces having marched along a very long path from Mavil Aru to Thoppigala in the Eastern liberation operation and from the Kalmadu to Puthukudiyiruppu on the Vanni liberation operation have come to a very decisive point of the war.

Having reached the edges of the No Fire Zone they cannot wait till the LTTE allow those civilians trapped inside since the history has proved beyond any doubt that the LTTE is not an organization with an iota of respect for humanity. Therefore, the Security Forces are now getting ready to launch one of the world's largest hostage rescue operations to free more than 50,000 civilians from LTTE detention.

The task may be very heavy but the troops are ready to take up this challenge too very positively to prove their metal as one of the best armies in the world to emerge victorious against the most ruthless terror outfit in the world.