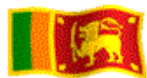


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PUTHUKUDIYIRUPPU:

LTTE last bastion falls

TIGERS RETREAT TO NO-FIRE ZONE:

Ranil Wijayapala

The LTTE yesterday lost its final stronghold Puthukudiyiruppu and several top rung leaders including Theepan, Vidusha, Durga, Gadafi and Nagulesh compelling Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran to seek refuge in the Safe Zone mingling with the civilians along with remaining top rung leaders Pottu Amman, Soosai and Velavan, military sources told the Daily News yesterday.

The last stronghold of the LTTE fell to the hands of the Security Forces following the 58 Division under the command of Brigadier Shavendra Silva, 53 Division under the command of Major General Kamal Gunaratne and Task Force VIII under the command of Colonel G.V. Ravipriya ended the long siege on the last square km held by the LTTE by yesterday morning.

According to military officials the LTTE's Northern leader Theepan, LTTE female Leader Vidusha and her deputy Durgaha, Batticaloa leader Nagulesh were confirmed killed and Military Wing leader Bhanu was critically injured in the fierce battles that raged during the past few days.

Theepan is the most senior military leader to be killed in the battlefield and his body was recovered by the 6 Gajaba Regiment troops attached to the 53 Division a senior Military official added.

The LTTE leader is now left with only his Intelligence Wing leader Pottu Amman, Sea Tiger leader Soosai and another top rung Sea Tiger leader Velavan to command the battle against the Security Forces, a senior military officials told the Daily News.

It has now been confirmed that the Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran also had a narrow escape as he had fled the area a day before the troops encircled the last terrain held by the LTTE. Massive stocks of arms and ammunition including three 130 mm heavy artillery guns, one 80 mm mortar launcher and 30 mm canon were among the recoveries by the Security Forces.

The 58 Division and the 53 Division along with the Task Force VIII encircled the last terrain held by the LTTE in Puthukudiyiruppu on Wednesday along with more than 200 Tiger cadres.

The 58 Division and the 53 Division encircled the area after 53 Division troops led by Major General Kamal Gunaratne moving from the South to North direction and 58 Division led by Brigadier Shavendra Silva moving from the North to South direction linked up in the south of Pachchapulmudai junction.

The LTTE tried to pose a major threat to the advancing Security Forces bringing their heavy artillery weapons to the battlefield to fire directly at the troops.

But troops could avert all their efforts by encircling the area in an unexpected moment, General Officer Commanding of the 58 Division Brigadier Shavendra Silva told the Daily News.

The LTTE never expected this sudden move by the 53 and 58 Divisions which has enabled the troops kill many senior leaders such as Theepan who commanded the Tiger cadres in the Northern front who was the architect of the bund defence system of the LTTE, General Officer Commanding of the 53 Division major General

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Kamal Gunaratne said. During the search operations conducted by the 53 Division and 58 Division troops recovered the luxury bullet-proof limousine of Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran and important personal documents belonging to Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran's son and daughter from the Tiger bases captured.

Puthukudiyiruppu and Iranapalai were the last strongholds held by the LTTE and the toughest battle in the Vanni liberation operation was fought in Puthukudiyiruppu as it turned out to be a do or die battle for the LTTE.

This was the first time the Security Forces has taken full control of Puthukudiyiruppu during the three decade long conflict in the North East.

Troops are now poised to encircle the Safe Zone with the objective of rescuing the civilian population detained by the LTTE there.

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