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FIRST VISIT BY A HEAD OF STATE:

President in Kilinochchi

VISITS SOLDIERS' BARRACKS AND SUPERVISES FACILITIES:

Rasika SOMARATHNA



Greeting the soldiers whilst having tea with them.

President Mahinda Rajapaksa yesterday made a historic visit to Kilinochchi, considered to be the first ever done by a Head of State.

Kilinochchi, the so-called political headquarters of the LTTE fell on January 2, 2009 as the Security Forces brought the entire town and it's immediate environs under their full control.

The surprise visit by the President had lasted more than three hours, where he had visited many important locations within the city, including the hospital and soldiers barracks. According to sources, he had walked freely in the streets, personally inspecting several sites.

The President had reportedly arrived in Kilinochchi around 7.30 am, in a helicopter, after making a brief stop at Vavuniya.

He had personally looked into facilities provided to soldiers and civilians.

The President's goodwill visit yesterday coincided with the traditional Sinhala and Tamil New Year. He met with the troops, IDP's and other civilians in the area.

Secretary of Defence Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) Air Chief Marshal Donald Perera, Army Commander Lieutenant General Sarath Fonseka, Navy Commander Vice Admiral Wasantha Karannagoda, Inspector General of Police Jayantha Wickramaratne had also accompanied the President.

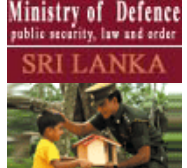
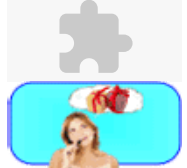
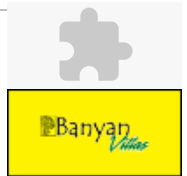
According to a member of his entourage, the President had personally inspected the town visiting several important locations within the city.

The town's main water tank

(destroyed by the fleeing LTTE cadres), had come under close scrutiny of the President. Also former LTTE political head quarters building, Peace Secretariat building too had been visited.



Inspecting LTTE made bomb recovered from Visuamadu.



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Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, Navy Commander Wasantha Karannagoda and IGP Jayantha Wickremaratne joining the tea party. Pix by Sudath Silva

Later the President had made a visit to the 58 division headquarters, and the soldiers' barracks in the immediate vicinity, to the surprise and delight of forces personnel.

He had paid special attention over facilities provided for the soldiers, while personally visiting their lodgings. During the visit he had personally observed the operations room in the 58 Division Head Quarters and also had viewed aerial visuals on the 'no fire zone' obtained from UAV's. The President had later gone to the Kilinochchi hospital, spending time with the injured soldiers and other civilians. He had distributed gift packs, after having a traditional new year meal consisting of 'Kiribath and Kevum' with the hospital inmates.

During the occasion, the GOC of 57 Division, Major General Jagath Dias and 58 Division GOC Brigadier Shavendra Silva had briefed the President regarding recent military achievements. According

to sources, the President on the occasion had also paid close attention to the prevailing situation in the 'No Fire' Zone and plans ahead with regards to freeing trapped civilians.

Later addressing the troops stationed in the area, the President commended their courage and commitment. While saying that their selfless dedication had brought the present victories, he had urged the soldiers to continue the good work as victory was at hand.



A large stock of arms and ammunition recovered by 57 and 59 Divisions on display.

The President had also emphasised the importance of safeguarding innocent civilians and ensuring them a safe passage to escape from the Tiger clutches.

During his visit, the President had also visited Vavuniya and had addressed troops located in the area. He had also advised officials to expedite relief and welfare activities with maximum efficiency. For a major period during the last three decades, the LTTE has given Kilinochchi a symbolic importance, calling it their administrative capital, even though the Government had been running most civil administrative functions including banking, healthcare, trade, education and welfare.

The LTTE first took hold of the town in 1990, when the Army withdrew it's forces from the area. Then later the security forces once again regained control of Kilinochchi during operation Sathjaya 1, 11 and 111 in 1996. The Kilinochchi town fell into terrorist hands once again in September 1998, and has been their administrative nerve centre until forces liberated the area fully in January 02, 2009.