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HOME  
Sunday, 19 April 2009

- OBSEVER ONLINE
  - News**
  - Editorial
  - Business
  - Features
  - Political
  - Security
  - Review
  - Sports
  - World
  - Panorama
  - Junior
  - Letters
  - Obituaries
- 
- OTHER PUBLICATIONS

- OTHER LINKS
- Marriage Proposals
  - Classifieds
  - GOVERNMENT GAZETTE

- SHARE MARKET
- EXCHANGE RATE
- TRADING
- PICTURE GALLERY
- ARCHIVES

NEARLY 3,000 ARRIVE YESTERDAY:

## Huge civilian influx

Shanika SRIYANANDA

The agitation brewing among the hostages against the LTTE terrorists in the No Fire Zone (NFZ) have eventually broken the iron gates of the LTTE's human prison as nearly 2,857 civilians have escaped the LTTE, yesterday. They have arrived to the 58 Division which is in close vicinity of the NFZ.

The LTTE, hoping for a last minute sympathetic response from the international community to call for a ceasefire to strengthen their fighting power, is holding thousands of civilians as a human shield despite repeated requests from the international community including the UN to let the civilians have freedom of movement.

The sudden influx of civilians was recorded after the 48-hour 'humanitarian pause' ended last Tuesday. According to sources, the group included 832 women, 772 men and children (Boys 680 and girls 645). A group of over 5,000 hostages were planning to escape and have had heated arguments with the terrorists who were trying to prevent them crossing the FDLs.

According to civilians, the LTTE had ordered the terrorists to open fire at the massive crowd. Thereafter half of them had run back while others managed to escape.

"The LTTE could not control the massive crowd. Civilians say that people were waiting for the military to rescue them", G-O-C of the 58 Division, Brigadier Shavendra Silva said.

He said that the civilians were able to motivate some terrorists who were guarding the FDLs to facilitate them to escape. "Some civilians had threatened the terrorists and some had fights with them to make the move", he said.

Among the civilians, there were casualties due to anti personnel mine blasts and gun shot injuries. They were immediately given medical treatment by the medical personnel of the Division.

The Brigadier Silva said that he was expecting more civilians to come in the next few days and his troops were capable to handle any number from the NFZ.

"Civilians who have fled to Army controlled areas are confident of the military", he said adding that his troops had managed to provide facilities for over 8,000 civilians who reached the Division in one single day two months ago. He said that the misconception created by the LTTE among the civilians that the soldiers were ruthless and barbaric was fading away since the soldiers welcome them as soon as they reach the government controlled areas.

"The main problem is that the LTTE is still holding civilians.

They have mined and heavily guarded all the possible gaps leading to our areas near the lagoon", he said.

After initial screening and necessary medical treatment and refreshments, the civilians are transported to the nearest welfare centres. According to intelligence sources, civilians in large numbers are getting organised against the LTTE in order to escape from their hold.

LTTE communications monitored have revealed that some terrorists have facilitated their kith and kin to flee secretly.

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