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LTTE divided

MAJORITY FOR SURRENDER, MINORITY FOR BATTLE:



President Mahinda Rajapaksa on Monday convened a special Security Council meeting to discuss the overall security situation in the country. The aim of this Security Council Meeting was to assess the ground realities in the battlefield and to decide on future action

plan of the Government with regard to the ongoing operations specially the humanitarian mission conducted by the Army to rescue the remaining civilians trapped inside the No Fire Zone.

During this meeting, special emphasis was given to discuss the matters relating to ensuring the safety of the civilians trapped inside the Southern part of the No Fire Zone, which has become a concern of the international community at present.

Military operations

It was after lengthy discussions, the Government took a decision to issue a crucial statement with regard to the ongoing military operations. Following this crucial Security Council meeting, the Government Information Department issued a press release to the media which said, "Government of Sri Lanka has decided that combat operations have reached their conclusion. Our Security Forces have been instructed to end the use of heavy calibre guns, combat aircraft and aerial weapons which could cause civilian casualties. Our Security Forces will confine their attempts to rescuing civilians who are held hostage and give foremost priority to saving civilians".



Infantry troops operating inside No Fire Zone getting ready for their final mission

This statement was misinterpreted by many media saying that the Government has decided to stop the ongoing military operations whilst some other media interpreted it as a ceasefire offer by the Government.

Since this statement came at a time when the LTTE, through its media network announced a unilateral

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vested interested media opted to interpret the statement issued by the Government as a declaration of a ceasefire in a different wording.

The misinterpreted version of the Government statement was spread all over the world and Government through the Defence Ministry website made a clarification, saying that the Government has not offered any ceasefire and it will continue with its humanitarian mission of rescuing the civilians trapped inside the No Fire Zone.

The essence of the Government statement was to declare that the combat operations have reached a conclusion and its decision to instruct Security Forces to end the use of heavy calibre guns, combat aircraft and aerial weapons which could cause civilian casualties.

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Although the decision was declared officially on Monday, the Security Forces had already ceased using heavy calibre guns, combat aircraft and aerial weapons for the past few weeks as they entered the No Fire Zone on April 20 from Puthumattalan and Ampalavanpokkanai as they were concerned about the plight of the civilians trapped inside the No Fire Zone.

The Sri Lanka Air Force has also ceased air attacks once the troops reached the outer perimeter of the No Fire Zone.

Therefore, the official statement by the Government was to display its deeper commitment in the true sense of protecting the civilians trapped inside the No Fire Zone during the operations which are being continued now to rescue the remaining civilians.

With this official statement troops have now, not only by their words but also by deed committed themselves not to use heavy calibre guns, combat aircraft and aerial weapons during this humanitarian operation.

However, the deep impact of the wrong interpretation given to this Government statement echoed internationally giving a wrong impression about the Sri Lankan situation to the world.



Getting ready for the rescue mission, 58 Division GOC Brigadier Shavendra Silva along with 58 Division Brigade Commanders Colonel Sanjay Wanigasinghe, Lt. Colonel Deshapriya Gunawardena and Lt. Colonel Ramesh Fernando along with Special Forces Brigade Commander Colonel Athula Kodippili and Commando Brigade Commander Colonel Ralph Nugera discussing the military plan in Puthumathalan.

Humanitarian mission

But unaffected by all these misinformation campaigns the Sri Lanka Army continued its humanitarian mission, of rescuing civilians under Tiger detention. The 58 Division of the Sri Lanka Army which created history by successfully completing the world's biggest hostage rescue mission along with the Commando and Special Forces troops continued with their mission capturing more areas inside the No Fire Zone.

Since April 20, the Security Forces have been able to rescue more than 113,000 civilians from this area successfully achieving the main objective of the humanitarian operation to liberate Vanni civilians from the Tiger grip.



Tiger earth bund captured by the 58 Division troops - Pictures by Rukmal Gamage

After the capture of the northern part of the No Fire Zone in Puthumattalan and Ampalavanpokkanai, infantry battalions attached to the 58 Division commenced their operations towards the southern part of the No Fire Zone. Initially the 11 Sri Lanka Light Infantry Battalion advanced towards the Valayamadam North area amidst stiff resistance from the LTTE.

Although, Special Forces and Commando troops supported this mission at the initial stage they were later withdrawn from that mission.

Thereafter, the 10 Sri Lanka Light Infantry Battalion and 12 Gemunu Watch battalion were deployed on that mission and they captured Valayamadam area on Sunday following a successful attempt they made during their advance.

During these operations the infantry troops had to be more concerned about the civilians who were held captive by the LTTE and avoid firing artillery and mortar

into the zone though the LTTE was firing their heavy calibre weapons, including artillery, mortar, padal gun and battle tanks.

The troops who have been advised not to use any heavy calibre weapons during this operation had to take the brunt of the Tiger fire but managed to advance further southwards amid troops sustaining injuries.

Tiger grip

They were successful in their mission as they were able to rescue more civilians from the Tiger grip as more than 2,500 civilians were rescued from that area on Sunday alone.

But the most challenging task of capturing heavily fortified earth bund which separated the No Fire Zone into two from the South of Valayamadam came on Monday night. The LTTE had constructed this earth bund soon after they were defeated in Puthu-kudiyiruppu. They took every possible measure to prevent the Security Forces reaching the most sensitive area in the No Fire Zone.

The earth bund which was constructed from the beach front to lagoon front right across the No Fire Zone from East to West in the South of Valayamadam was 10 feet in height and 700 metres in length. There was a 6 feet deep ditch behind that earth bund so that troops attempting to cross this earth bund end up in falling into that ditch.

Since the situation was quite challenging, the General Officer Commanding of the 58 Division Brigadier Shavendra Silva took a decision to cross this earth bund during the night as the resources that could be committed to this operation was limited in view of the latest decision by the Government.

Strict instructions were given to the troops not to fire artillery, mortar and other heavy weapons during this operation. Therefore, troops were equipped only with their small arms during this operation.

Despite this situation infantrymen attached to the 58 Division were able to capture the earth bund following close quarter fighting with the LTTE cadres holding that earth bund.

After close quarter fighting with the LTTE the infantry troops of the 58 Division captured the earth bund. But, the real fighting began after troops dominated the earth. The LTTE leaders, who were totally disappointed with the situation, sent an explosive laden truck into the earth bund around 1.30 am in the morning.

Soldiers who were ready to face any eventuality displayed their gallantry firing RPGs to the truck which was fast moving towards the earth bund. Troops, managed to blow up the explosive laden truck even without an iota of regard for their safety.

But it was not the end. On Wednesday too the LTTE made several suicide attempts to recapture the earth bund in Rettavaikkal. According to military there had been six suicide missions by the LTTE to recapture the earth bund between 2.30 a.m. and 4.30 a.m. on Wednesday. Three suicide cadres, two explosive laden motorbikes and a double cab were blown off by the troops before they reached towards military controlled areas. It was display of gallantry by the troops, even though they were aware of the fact that they too will be blown off once they fired RPGs to those moving vehicles but they did it for the sake of the country.

A number of soldiers sacrificed their lives and some were wounded but managed to withhold to all suicide missions by the LTTE which had become the sole weapon of the LTTE at this moment.

Even under these circumstances the 58 Division troops managed to advance further south of the earth bund and had linked up with the 53 Division troops operating in the South of Valayamadam. The 58 Division troops are now heading

towards the junction which links the Puthumattalan - Mulluaitivu road into the Paranthan - Mullaitivu A-35 road.

During the search and clear operations troops recovered an improvised armour-plated six-wheel truck, apparently used for transport of LTTE terrorist leaders across uncleared areas in the most recent past. This bullet-proof vehicle could accommodate a few passengers inside in addition to its driver.

The front section of the vehicle, identical to that of a modern electric train had also a powerful communication antenna, jutting out from one side of the driver's seat.

The vehicle has also been used recently as empty biscuit wrappers and water bottles were found inside.

Troops engaged in search and clear operations also uncovered a massive suicide craft fitted with two 400 HP engines. According to military more than 1500 Kg of explosives can be stored inside this craft and it could make a devastating impact if it rams into a big vessel.

Security Forces believe that the LTTE had designed this huge explosive craft targeting the troop carrier Jet Liner which transported 3,000 troops who were going on leave and reporting back to duty in the Jaffna peninsula.

Even the military intelligence were not aware of existence such a huge suicide craft which has been designed to operate in the surface of the sea without being detected on Radar screens. The recovery of such a huge suicide craft is a great relief for the Security Forces.

International media

Amid this situation, the visit of UK Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Secretary of State David Miliband and French Foreign and European Affairs Minister Dr. Bernard Kauchner also become a hot topic among international media as there were speculations that they had arrived here to exert pressure on the Government to go for a ceasefire to get the civilians out of the No Fire Zone.

However, during the briefing given to the visiting Foreign Ministers at the Foreign Ministry, Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa has stated that there is no need to go for Ceasefire at this juncture to liberate the civilians as more than 85 per cent of civilians trapped inside the No Fire Zone have already arrived in military controlled areas.

President Mahinda Rajapaksa and Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa have maintained the position that there is no need of a ceasefire to rescue the remaining civilians inside the No Fire Zone.

Diplomatic sources also indicate that many more countries are trying get the Government to offer a Ceasefire for the remaining civilians to flee from the No Fire Zone.

But reliable sources indicate that it was after LTTE's newly appointed Chief Negotiator K.P. Pathnathan's discussions with the Norwegians, a suggestion was made for the LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran to surrender to a third party.

No Fire Zone

That suggestion made by United States was totally rejected by Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa saying that any surrendering by the LTTE, should be done to the Security Forces but not to any third party.

According to diplomatic sources the suggestion for Prabhakaran to surrender to a third party had emerged after Tigers operating inside the No Fire Zone had made a desperate plea to Kumaran Pathmanathan to do something to rescue the remaining Tiger cadres including Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran.

However, it has been reported that KP has suggested surrendering to the Sri Lankan Government as there is no other option available for them to rescue Prabhakaran from the No Fire Zone.

According to sources the Tiger cadres trapped inside the No Fire Zone are divided in their opinion. A majority of the Tiger cadres are making appeals to the Tiger leadership to surrender to the Security Forces whilst another section of Tiger cadres numbering less than 100 are suggesting that they should fight till the last cadre killed.

So, a desperate situation has arisen among the Tiger cadres trapped inside the No Fire Zone at present whether to surrender or to continue their fight till the last inch of land is captured by the Security Forces.

Amid this situation intelligence reports also indicate that the LTTE leadership is getting ready to flee the country preparing six high powered boats and another five boats packed with ration packets.

However, during the past week the Sri Lanka Navy has intensified their presence of small craft in the North East seas to avert any Tiger attempt to flee the country by sea. At three occasions during this week the Navy destroyed number of Tiger boats which attempted to breach the Naval defence covering the North Eastern sea bed.

So LTTE Intelligence Wing leader Pottu Amman who is commanding the Tiger cadres along with Soosai, Jeyam who had returned to the battlefield this week and Velavan are making continuous appeals to the ground level cadres to make maximum efforts to delay the advance of the troops into Vellamullivaikkal and Kariyamullivaikkal areas where Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran is living.

But determined troops of the 58 Division of the Sri Lanka Army with the blessings of the Army Commander Lt. General Sarath Fonseka, are now spearheading the final phase of the battle to rescue the remaining civilians and to capture the last inch of land held by the LTTE eliminating its entire leadership, unaffected by the international and local moves to stop their march at the last moment.

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