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## Troops advance into last Tiger terrain on three fronts

FERCE FIGHTING IN MULLAITIVU NORTH:

58 DIV DEALS FINAL BLOW TO LAST TIGER EARTH BUND:

by Ranil Wijayapala



final victory.

The final thrust on the last batch of LTTE cadres including Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran aimed at rescuing the remaining civilians, reached one of the most decisive phases as of yesterday with troops making speedy progress within the last 48 hours with the 58 Division following a fierce battle capturing the LTTE's last earth bund following a fierce battle that opened up their path to reach their

With these developments, one of the crucial hours in the Vanni liberation operation is now on in the battlefield, as troops of the 58 and 53 Divisions reached some 600 metres closer to the newly demarcated No Fire Zone after considering the ground realities there.

The newly demarcated NFZ was declared on Friday considering the presence of civilian population inside the area controlled by the LTTE after 58 Division captured the final earth bund existed there in the NFZ as of Friday, in the early hours. However, the decision to redesign the NFZ was taken at the Security Council Meeting held on Wednesday following a proposal made by Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa to the Security Council meeting since a major portion of the earlier declared NFZ has already been captured by the troops after April 20.



Although the earlier demarcated NFZ has been captured by the troops many international and local organizations, specially the media are still using the word NFZ for the areas captured by the troops thus giving a wrong impression about the ongoing military operations since they are being conducted within the earlier declared NFZ.

It was following the troops advance further southwards of the NFZ that the Army headquarters on Friday declared this newly designed NFZ south of Vellamullivaikkal considering the presence of the civilians.

With the declaration of this newly designed NFZ, the LTTE is now restricted to an area less than 3 sq km along with the newly demarcated NFZ. Therefore, the capture of the heavily fortified earth bund of the LTTE by the 58 Division troops was a further step forward.

According to military officials the earth bund captured by the 58 Division troops was the biggest such they have come across inside the NFZ as it has been constructed by the LTTE before the troops entered the NFZ.

Fierce fighting erupted in this terrain in Vellamullivaikkal as LTTE deployed their well trained cadres on the battlefield without keeping faith on their half trained cadres and newly recruits to fight with the troops of the 58 Division.

The battle turned out to be a bitter one for the troops as they have to cross the heavy mine field laid by the LTTE in this terrain during night hours as the massive open areas do not permit them to launch any operation during the day.

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The severe hot weather conditions prevailing there in this desert like land also makes it difficult for them to engage in any military operations. Therefore, they have to conduct all their operations during night hours engaging in Reece missions during the day.

After overcoming all earth bunds, the 58 Division troops determined to take up the challenge of capturing this final earth bund on Wednesday night. Accordingly 6 Gemunu Watch (GW) battalion under the command of Lt. Colonel Kamal Pinnawala, 7 Sinha Regiment (SR) battalion under the command of Lt. Colonel Kithsiri Liyanage and 9 Vijayaba Infantry Regiment (VIR) under the command of Lt. Colonel Sisira Herath were entrusted with the task of capturing this heavily fortified earth bund from A-35 road towards the beach in the Eastern coast.

Since the operation was a serious one, 58 Division GOC Brigadier Shavendra Silva personally directed ground troops in their advance towards the earth bund while observing the Tiger reactions through the UAV visuals from the operations room of the 58 Division.

Even Army Commander Lt. General Sarath Fonseka was keenly observing the progress of the battle from Colombo since it was a crucial battle that would decide the final battle against the LTTE. The capture of the earth bund was not an easy game. In some areas troops faced less resistance and managed to capture it during their first attempt. The 6 GW troops managed to capture the bund in their first attempt but later faced stiff resistance from the LTTE with scores of soldiers sustaining injuries in their bid to hold onto the earth bund.

The 7 SR troops faced stiff resistance from the LTTE in the middle of the bund between the A-35 road and the beach. On one occasion the troops had to be withdrawn from the positions they captured in the earth bund due to heavy LTTE resistance. Dozens of soldiers sustained injuries and some made the supreme sacrifice during their advance into the earth bund which was full of Anti Personnel Mines, during night hours. There were occasions they could not evacuate their casualties due to stiff LTTE resistance.

On some instances, as they were operating at different locations of the earth bund, troops could not recognize Tiger cadres who had arrived there giving Army identification during night hours. But ultimately the troops of the 58 Division stood victorious by Thursday night after repulsing all the counter LTTE attacks. It was considered to be the most decisive battle the LTTE had fought within the NFZ as 58 Division troops recovered more than 35 bodies of well trained Tiger cadres along with massive stocks of arms and ammunitions during search operations conducted on Friday.

Among the recoveries were automatic grenade launchers which have been recovered from the LTTE for the first time. One could therefore understand the type of sophisticated weapons the Tiger cadres had used against the troops who have to restrict their offensive operations only using small arms.



However, this was the biggest defeat the LTTE faced following their defeat in Iranapalai in Puthukudiyiruppu where scores of Tiger cadres were killed along with their leaders. But the capture of the earth bund was not the end game. The troops attached to 58 Division managed to advance another 600 meters from the earth bund as they face no other obstacle in the vicinity during their advance.

As 58 Division troops under the command of Brigadier Shavendra Silva captured the last earth bund of

the LTTE, the 53 Division under the command of Major General Kamal Gunaratne also advanced further southwards from the land stretch between the A-35 road and the Nandikadal lagoon.

The 6 Gajaba Regiment (GR) attached to the Air Mobile Brigade under the command of Colonel Thilak Hangilipola, managed to cross a massive open terrain facing the

Nandhikadal lagoon. To reach this terrain the 53 Division had to cross number of earth bunds created by the LTTE obstructing their advance initially along the A-35 road and later between Nandhikadal lagoon and the A-35 road.

As the battle gathered new momentum in the early hours of Friday with 58 Division and 53 Division advancing into the last terrain under LTTE control, the ground troops opened up another front to advance into the remaining areas under Tiger control, with 59 Division troops, now under the command of Brigadier Prasanna Silva crossing the narrow stretch of lagoon North of Mullaitivu as of Friday.

The 59 Division troops remained static in Mullaitivu North front as it was detrimental to enter the last terrain held by the LTTE using its cream of cadres from one front. With the capture of the last Tiger earth bund confining the LTTE into an area less than 3 km the troops of the 59 Division, now under the command of the Brigadier Prasanna Silva, took this decision to advance from South to North direction.

Army Commander Lt. General Sarath Fonseka decided to send General Officer Commanding of the 55 Division Brigadier Prasanna Silva to overlook operational matters of the 59 Division last week; especially to prepare the ground troops for the final offensive against the LTTE.

Brigadier Chagie Gallage, who was overlooking the operational matters of the 59 Division, was appointed the Acting GOC of the 55 Division immediately after this change.

The troops commanded by Brigadier Prasanna Silva managed to cross the lagoon from the beach front amidst heavy resistance. They had posed a bogus advance towards Tiger terrain using boats and managed to induce the troops into LTTE terrain whilst facing heavy resistance.

The LTTE too having understood the severe threat coming from the southern front also fired their 122 mm artillery to stop their advance. Four soldiers succumbed to their injuries due to the fire, directing their artillery guns directly to the Security Forces defences.

The biggest resistance came from the heavy calibre weapons located on the hijacked Jordanian vessel Fara III stationed closer to the shore. With this advancement, troops are only few hundred meters away from the area where the LTTE's keeping them as hostages for the survival of Tiger leader Prabhakaran and the handful of Tiger leaders including Intelligence Wing leader Pottu Amman and Sea Tiger leader Soosai for their escape from the country.

Exodus of civilians, trapped inside this small terrain, is expected into the military controlled areas immediately, and troops were closing in on the last terrain as of yesterday morning on three fronts. Army Commander Lt. General Sarath Fonseka was in Vanni yesterday to observe the progress and to give the final touches to the battle to be fought in the coming days.

The troops are expecting the worst kind of resistance from the LTTE as they make their final bid to capture the last terrain from the LTTE and to rescue the remaining civilians in the area.

According to military officials, the LTTE will go for real suicide missions once troops surround the last batch of Tiger cadres inside the NFZ. So they have to make tactical moves into the remaining terrain to avoid civilian casualties if the LTTE tries to keep the civilians further under their detention.

With the troops reaching the most decisive final battle, the Government is also facing numerous pressures from the international community to stop the military thrust on the last terrain of the LTTE for offering reasons of civilian casualties.

However, President Mahinda Rajapaksa and Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa have been able to stick to their decision that there would be no end to the military operations under any circumstances until the troops capture Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran dead or alive.

Many foreign nations are under pressure as the Tamil Diaspora across the globe are now engaged in a mission to create a hostile relationship between the Sri Lankan Government and the international community. For this, they are engaged in violent campaigns

demolishing and damaging the properties of the diplomatic missions who are supporting the Sri Lankan Government to see an end of LTTE terrorism through military means.

Many countries are under huge pressure from the LTTE to intervene into the Sri Lankan situation, on the pretext of the civilian population trapped inside the NFZ. But their real intention is to get the involvement of US or UK to rescue Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran.

Many of the foreign nations have to admit the fact that the Sri Lankan Government is very much concerned about the plight of the civilians as they have managed to rescue 185,000 civilians from the jackboot of the LTTE and provide them safer environment in Government controlled areas.

Therefore, many of the foreign diplomats visiting Sri Lanka were prompted to donate funds in millions for the welfare of the displaced civilians now living in welfare centres in Mannar, Vavuniya and Jaffna, and to improve their health conditions. The resettlement program initiated by the Government has also made a great impact on the international community as they were very much concerned about the plight of the civilians after the end of this military campaign. Under these circumstances, no force can stop the final victory of the Security Forces to end the three decade long regime of terror under the megalomaniac Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran, as the Government under President Mahinda Rajapaksa is spearheading a multi-frontal war facing all sorts of resistance locally and internationally to keep his promise to the nation to defeat LTTE terrorism and usher in permanent peace in the country.

## SL Navy on alert to prevent LTTE leaders escape

The Sri Lanka Navy is on full alert off the Mullaitivu seas in order to prevent any escape attempt by LTTE leaders and maintain four tight defence lines consisting of Fast Attack Crafts (FACs), Off-shore Petrol Vessels (OPVs), Gun Boats, the Rapid Action Boat Squadron (RABS) and Special Boat Squadron (SBS). Last week the Navy prevented a Sea Tiger attack which tried to breach the defence line, using at least four suicide boats.

