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FINAL BATTLE TO RESCUE REMAINING CIVILIANS ENTERS CRUCIAL STAGE:

## Tigers destroy own vehicles, assets

The LTTE cadres unable to withstand the military thrust on them in the last few kilometres in the North of Mullaitivu have started blasting and destroying their own vehicles and other assets as the final battle to rescue the remaining civilians entered into its most crucial stage, with the 58 and 53 Divisions entering into the newly formed safe zone and 59 Division advanced into the area from the south.

### Troops foil major LTTE attack

Ranil WIJAYAPALA

The 59 Division troops who crossed the Waddawakkal causeway in the North of Mullaitivu reaching the south of the No Fire Zone, on Tuesday night foiled a major LTTE sea and ground attack to recapture the newly liberated areas destroying a number of Tiger suicide boats and killing scores of Tiger cadres, military officials said yesterday.

The fighting broke out on Tuesday around 9.30 p.m as 59 Division troops were consolidating their positions along the earth bund they captured after crossing the lagoon in Waddawakkal.

"Initially there were huge Tiger suicide boats fitted with high powered engines and two of them rammed into the bunkers held by the troops in the ground. The engines of these suicide boats were so powerful that they can reach the bunkers in the ground once they landed in the beach," the official added. Another suicide boat that reached the shore after the initial attack was damaged by the troops preventing it reaching the shore. Amid the seaborne attack, more than 100 to 150 Tiger cadres attempted to breach the newly captured earth bund South of the safe zone but that attempt was also foiled by troops killing scores of Tigers.

"Fierce fighting continued till 1 am on Wednesday as the LTTE deployed some of their suicide cadres to breach the Security Forces' defences," the senior official added.

"The LTTE tried to cut off the troops who had crossed Waddawakkal bridge by launching this type of sea and ground attack," the official added.

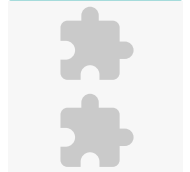
The 58 Division has advanced further interior into the safe zone whilst the 53 Division just entering into safe zone area are poised to rescue the remaining civilians very soon, the officials added. Troops operating just a few hundred metres away from the area where the LTTE is forcibly keeping civilians, have observed many explosions inside the safe zone and the manner in which the LTTE is setting fire to the vehicles and other properties. "It seems that the LTTE is making a last minute attempt to tarnish the image of the Security Forces creating massive destruction inside the new safe zone.

The LTTE is causing civilian deaths and casualties as they cannot hold into the area with the troops advancing both from the North and South," a senior military official in the battlefield told the Daily News.

"Therefore, the next 24 hours to 48 hours will be crucial in respect of rescuing the remaining civilians held hostage by the LTTE," the official added.

According to military officials, 96 civilians who crossed the Nanthikadal lagoon using various floating equipment arrived in military controlled areas in the early hours of yesterday.

A pregnant mother injured following firing by the LTTE, was airlifted to Vavuniya along with her husband and two children as soon as they reached military controlled areas under the 59 Division.


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These civilians have reported that the LTTE is making desperate attempts to stop them fleeing the Tiger controlled areas using force against them.

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