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GOVERNMENT GAZETTE

Ground troops brave terrorists' last-gasp attacks



The three year long effort by the Sri Lankan Security Forces to eradicate LTTE terrorism has reached its climax as troops engaged in the final battle to rescue the last batch of civilians kept hostage by the Tiger terrorists entered into its most crucial stages as of yesterday

(May 14, 2009) with troops operating in a hugging distance to the area where thousands of civilians were living under LTTE detention.

It was not only a battle between the Security Forces and the Tiger terrorists but also a battle between the truth and the false as Government had to wage a parallel war to combat the disinformation campaign orchestrated by the LTTE backed media organizations in their last minute bid to stop the final push on Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran.



Troops of the 58 Division reached closer to Fara III, the Jordanian vessel grounded in the Mullaitivu seas after advancing from the Northern edge of the Safe Zone. A view of the ship from the Mullaitivu side. Pictures by Rukmal Gamage

If ground troops faced its toughest battle with the LTTE the Government also had to face the toughest battle against the disinformation campaign and to disseminate the correct version on the Sri Lankan situation whilst many international organizations including the United Nations started to explain the situation inside the safe zone as a 'blood bath' depending on false information disseminated by the pro-LTTE media machineries.

International media

It was obvious that the LTTE was engaged in this strong disinformation campaign to tarnish the image of the Sri Lankan Government and the Security Forces as they saw the end of their existence in the Sri Lankan soil. So they want to end the Security Forces effort to liberate the remaining civilians in a bloodbath killing their own Tamil people to reach their ulterior motive.

The most unfortunate thing was that even some international media who are keenly observing the Sri Lankan situation, have become a part and parcel of this disinformation campaign, filing exaggerated news reports without having verified information about the plight of the civilians inside the safe zone.

Commanding the troops for the final battle



Brigadier Shavendra Silva
General Officer
Commanding
58 Division



Major General
Kamal Gunaratna
General Officer
Commanding
53 Division



Brigadier Prasanna Silva
Acting General

What the international media does not understand is that the LTTE media machinery is so powerful even to mislead the international

journalist with hot news which had never happened in reality through their proxies, making them a tool of their disinformation campaign.

So in a scenario in which the international media is going after most demanded stories, stories that sell, it is difficult to counter this disinformation campaign, but the Government managed to counter the disinformation campaign carried out by the LTTE to minimize the damage on the Sri Lankan Government and the Security Forces.

It was under these circumstances, the Government managed to entertain the support of the UN Security Council amidst various pressures by US, UK, France to have formal sessions on Sri Lankan situation.

Lankan situation

Finally the UN Security Council ended up their informal sessions on Sri Lankan situation issuing a nine paragraph statement on the Sri Lankan situation on May 13.

Whilst expressing grave concern about the situation in Sri Lanka the UN Security Council members in the second paragraph of their statement states that the members of the Security Council strongly condemn the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) for its acts of terrorism over many years, and for its continued use of civilians as human shields, and acknowledge the legitimate right of the Government of Sri Lanka to combat terrorism.

The members of the Security Council demand that the LTTE lay down its arms and allow the tens of thousands of civilians still in the conflict zone to leave.



Waduvakal causeway across the Nanthikadal lagoon in the North of Mullaitivu

Countries like Japan, China, Russia, Libya and Vietnam had reportedly backed the Sri Lankan Government effort to eradicate LTTE terrorism whilst Western nations continued to pressurize the Government to have a pause in its military operations to allow the civilians to move out of the conflict zone.

Once again it was not a question of having a pause in firing but an issue that has to be responded by the LTTE alone as the Security Forces have never stopped civilians coming out of the safe zone. They have expressed their consent and agreement over and over again to stop firing if any of these international players can take a guarantee from the LTTE that they would allow the civilians to move out of the conflict zone according to their wish.

So once again it become an issue relating to the LTTE but not to the Sri Lankan Government as it is engaged in a process of the rescuing the civilians from the grip of the LTTE whilst eradicating LTTE terrorism.

It is under these circumstances the Security Forces, especially the Sri Lanka Army are engaged in their final battle against the LTTE in a tiny strip of land in the North of Mullaitivu to rescue the remaining civilians from the LTTE.

At the beginning of this week the Sri Lanka Army has opened up a new front to reach the final terrain under the LTTE with 59 Division starting their offensive

operation from Vaddawakkal causeway area in the immediate North of Mullaitivu town under the command of Brigadier Prasanna Silva.

Brigadier Prasanna Silva, the General Officer Command of the 55 Division was sent to overlook the operational matters of the 59 Division which was under the command of Major General Nandana Udawatta.

The 59 Division was not engaged in offensive operations after the capture of the Mullaitivu town and continued their defensive role until they commenced operations last week to advance in a South to North direction towards the newly demarcated Safe Zone.

However, with the changes that took place with the appointing of Major General Nandana Udawatta as the Overall Operations Command of Anuradhapura with the due retirement of Major General Sanath Karunaratne, Brigadier Prasanna Silva has been appointed as the Acting GOC of the 59 Division. However, Brigadier Chagie Gallage who is now overlooking the command of the 55 Division temporarily is due to take over the command of 59 Division very soon.

No Fire Zone

However, it was under the command of Brigadier Prasanna Silva, the 6 Sri Lanka Light Infantry battalion commanded by Major Nandana Yahampath, was able to cross the Nanthikdal lagoon in the isthmus of the Mullaitivu town, by last Friday and to capture a stretch of LTTE earth bund from the beach front.

The 59 Division has to advance nearly 2 Km to reach the southern edge of the No Fire Zone and they had to face stiff resistance from the LTTE as the troops were entering a most secured terrain under LTTE control.

At the initial stages the 59 Division troops faced stiff resistance from the LTTE as the biggest resistance came from the heavy weapons they have located inside the Jordanian merchant vessel Fara III which has been grounded closer to Mullaitivu shores few years back.

The capture of the Tiger earth bund in the southern edge by the ground troops, increased the threat on the LTTE by two fold as they earlier had to face the troops only from the Northern front.

Now the LTTE had to concentrate on two Northern and Southern fronts and to commit its depleting strength into two fronts, making it much more difficult for them to defend the last terrain.

As troops of the 593 Brigade under the command of Lt. Colonel Sujeewa Senerath Yapa were consolidating their positions in the newly captured Tiger earth bund in the beach front, the LTTE launched a massive counter attack on Tuesday night to recapture the lost terrain.

The initial attack came from suicide boats which rammed into bunkers manned by the 6 Sri Lanka Light Infantry battalion from the lagoon front. The suicide boat that rammed into the bunker was larger than the usual suicide boats of the LTTE, and was fitted with 500 HP outboard motors so that it can reach the ground once they land in the shore.

According to ground troops there had been three other suicide boats which had attempted to reach the Security Forces, and one was fired upon by the troops and another was disabled after killing the operator. Troops also have observed that another suicide boat turned away once two suicide boats were destroyed by the troops.

As the LTTE attempt to breach the Security Forces defences in the beach and lagoon front was effectively foiled by the ground troops the LTTE made another attempt from the ground to breach and recapture the earth bund. They have used even a 122 mm artillery gun directly destroying the bunkers manned by the troops.

Fierce fighting erupted as 150 to 200 Tiger cadres attempted to breach the 59 Division Forward Defence Line close to Wadduvakkal causeway. Scores of Tiger cadres were believed to have been killed during this confrontation as troops observed the bodies of Tiger cadres strewn ahead of their defences.

The troops attached to the 6 Sri Lanka Light Infantry (SLLI) battalion, 11 Gemunu Watch (GW) battalion, 12 SLLI battalion and two squadrons of the 4 Special Forces battalion attached to 593 Brigade commanded by Lt. Colonel Sujeewa Senerath Yapa fought this battle to defend the captured territory. As the LTTE made desperate attempts to stop the troops reaching the southern edge of the No Fire Zone, the 58 Division under the command of Brigadier Shavendra Silva and 53 Division under the command of Major General Kamal Gunaratne also made steady progress having reached towards the newly demarcated Safe Zone in the South of Karayanmullivaikkal from the Northern front.

The 11 SLLI battalion under the command of Lt. Colonel Kithsiri Ekanayake, 12 Gajaba Regiment (GR) under the command of Major Saliya Amunugama and 9 Gemunu Watch battalion under the command of Lt. Colonel Lal Chandrasiri advanced further into the Safe Zone located in the East of A-35 road.

A-35 Road

As ground troops advanced into the Safe Zone after capturing the last earth bund in the northern part of the safe zone, LTTE made a desperate bid to stop them, after directing fire using many heavy weapons. It was on Wednesday the 9 Gemunu Watch battalion was able to capture a 6 barrel Multi Barrel Rocket Launcher used against the troops in Kariyanmullivaikkal area.

As of yesterday the 58 Division has reached towards the Fara III ship from the beach front and was in the process of completely capturing the safe zone in the East of A-35 Road.

With this move the LTTE has pushed the civilians further south of the Safe Zone and nearly 1000 civilians started to flow into 59 Division area in Mullaitivu crossing the Nanthikadal lagoon. Many of the civilians had to cross the lagoon using tubes and other floating instruments as the water level of the lagoon was little high in that area.

The 574 Brigade under the command of Lt. Colonel Senaka Wijesuriya was receiving the civilians reaching toward the 59 Division.

Communications

According to assessments of the military an exodus of civilians can be expected on Thursday night or today with the 53 Division reaching further south of the No Fire Zone once the 58 Division reaches the Southern edge of the safe zone from the beach front.

The 1 and 6 Gajaba Regiment battalions, 5 GW and 5 Vinajayaba Infantry Regiment attached to the 53 Division are advancing from the West of A-35 Road. If troops are able to rescue the remaining civilians peacefully they are free to engage the LTTE cadres without restricting the use of their fire power against the LTTE. That was why the LTTE is making a last minute attempt to prevent civilians fleeing from that area.

According to the military at least another 30,000 civilians are trapped inside this safe zone and are due to arrive in Government controlled areas by Friday morning if the ongoing operations to rescue them were effective.

However, military intelligence indicate that the LTTE will continue their battle until the death of its last cadre as there are strong indications that Tiger leader Velupillai Prabahakaran is still there in Mullaitivu North.

According to intercepted radio communications, there are lots of disagreements between the ground level cadres and the leaders as many of the cadres want to

surrender to the Security Forces.

The civilians fleeing from the area have divulged that even LTTE Political Chief and former Police Chief Nadesan has been shot by the LTTE when he attempted to flee the area mingling with the civilians.

Military intelligence also indicates that the LTTE is still maintaining 400 to 500 hardcore Tiger cadres with them to continue their fight till the last inch of land is deprived to them by the Security Forces.

But the next few hours will definitely decide how long the Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran can survive along with the handful number of leaders in this tiny strip of land in Mullaitivu North as he would be isolated completely as troops are poised to rescue the remaining civilians from the LTTE grip as they did it on April 20 recreating world history of hostage rescue missions.

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