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HIS REORGANISATION OF SL ARMY HELPED CRUSH LTTE:

Army Commander assures LTTE is finished

By Shanika SRIYANANDA

On the threshold of winning Asia's longest terrorist war, Army Commander Lt. Gen. Sarath Fonseka said that apart from military commitment towards the annihilation of the LTTE, the present political leadership has led the soldiers to close the lid on the decades long bloody war.

The Army Chief said that President Mahinda Rajapaksa's commitment towards an end to the LTTE was never seen in previous regimes, and this had motivated the military to defeat the LTTE.

Apart from destroying the terrorist outfit, the soldiers, who turned a new leaf in the war history by rescuing the world's largest hostage population, are now inching towards rescuing the last hostage under the terrorists herded in a narrow strip of sandy land in Puthumathalan.

"Inch by inch we are reaching our target. It is totally a hostage rescue mission and our soldiers will fight with the terrorists until we rescue the last hostage under the LTTE", he said.

Vowing not to let Prabhakaran or the LTTE raise their ugly heads again, the war veteran, who fought in every corner of the North and East, said that the LTTE would be forgotten by the people soon.

In an interview with the 'Sunday Observer' he said that no one would challenge the sacrifices made by the soldiers in each of these victories.

Lt. Gen. Fonseka, who was tributed by the Indian military expert R.K. Narayan as the world's best Army Commander, said that no one would challenge the sacrifices made by the soldiers in each of these victories.

Excerpts of the interview:

Q: The closure of the sluice gates of Mavil Aru was the turning point of the whole military operation to wipe out the LTTE. How do you compare the LTTE then and now?

A: I am grateful to Prabhakaran for selecting Mavil Aru. It was the correct place to start off this military battle. It had created the best environment to start attacking him to destroy terrorism. The LTTE was considered to be one of the powerful terrorist outfits in the world due to certain propaganda at that time. From Mavil Aru we disproved all those views. This military thrust to destroy the LTTE has pushed Prabhakaran - who was born and bred in the beaches of Welwattithurai-back to the beaches of Puthumathalan.



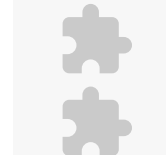
Lieutenant General Sarath Fonseka

Q: What were the obstacles that you have faced so far?

A: No major obstacles other than the false propaganda and the criticisms by unpatriotic people. But the continuous flowing of ammunition and weapons were another main obstacle to defeat the LTTE. If the paths for this flow were blocked the Army could have defeated the LTTE faster than this. The main obstacle in our military thrust was that the LTTE had enough fire power. Because of this the solders had made lots of sacrifices from their lives to limbs.

Q: The LTTE was considered as one of the most powerful terrorist organisations in the world. How do you define them today?

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A: Some interested parties - locally and internationally tried to make the outfit high. They tried to bloat up Prabhakaran's image. These groups including the Tamil extremists work hard to create a picture that the LTTE could not be defeated. They made people to worship the LTTE. On the other hand, the Tamil diaspora, who believed in separate land for Tamils, is responsible for these misleading propaganda. Because of them the LTTE and Prabhakaran had become heroes. But we have proved to the world that they are not so capable. The LTTEers are not heroes, but only a group of terrorists.

Q: What do you think was the success behind the repeated war victories?

A: It is the political leadership with the commitment of the military that led the battle to success. We have the best political leadership to destroy terrorism in this country. It was never there before to this extent. The military achieved these war victories after President Mahinda Rajapaksa came into power.

He, who believed that terrorism should and could be eliminated, gave priority do go ahead with our military strategies. And no Defence Secretary was there like the present Secretary Gotabhya Rajapaksa who had the same commitment and knowledge on how to crush the LTTE. Finally, they gave me the chance of going ahead with the military plan.

I always got the fullest support from the Air Force for the Northern operation and the Police and the STF helped me in the Eastern liberation.

Amidst military battles that were sweeping the terrorists in each area that they stepped into, the political hierarchy too had fought a battle locally and internationally to convince LTTE sympathizers. The firm decision of the political hierarchy not to go for talks with the LTTE terrorists until they lay down arms had contributed significantly to all these war victories. On the other hand, nobody can challenge the sacrifices that the Army had made. We did not create dramatic moves but did sincere work to crush the LTTE. Especially we were confident of what we were doing.

I always set an example for the people under my command and made them understand that only sincere work would bring good outcome.

Q: Were you confident from the beginning that the Army could defeat the LTTE?



A: Yes, I was aware of the capabilities of the LTTE. We also knew the strength, weaknesses and the shortcomings of the LTTE. And we started attacking these points correctly.

Q: Do you think that the changes, like appointing young officers as GOCs to lead the battle, you brought into the Army had resulted in this success?

A: I did not select these officers because they are young. But they were appointed as I thought they were the best to command the battle. I went to the lines and picked up the capable people. I had to drop those who had less capacity to lead the battle. Some of them are good for other work like administration activities. Therefore, the good commanders were chosen to command this battle. I thought seniority was immaterial if they could not command the soldiers properly. I restructured the Army and changed almost all the aspects of the organisation. I made the Sri Lanka Army a more professional Army. Everybody had to work with a sense of professionalism.

People of the North and East were brain washed by the LTTE which claimed that the Sri Lanka Army was an inhuman military. They showed the soldiers as rapists and murders, but today the reality has come to light through professionalism. One can guess it from the results that the

Army has produced.

Q: The Army can now boast about the success of the world's biggest rescue operation. How do you plan to rescue the rest?

A: We have completed it over 80 percent and still the terrorists hold the innocent people under their custody. The soldiers would take the remaining hostages out of the LTTE soon. Inch by inch we are reaching our target. As this is totally a hostage rescue mission, the military has certain constraints in using the full fire power, but we are very close to completing the rescue mission.

Q: It is reported that the LTTE is trying to destabilise the East. Will there be room for them to rise?

A: It is impossible due to two reasons. One is that Tamils themselves would not allow them to come up.

The second is that the Sri Lanka military will not let the LTTE to rise.

We have and will take every initiative to ensure no terrorist will survive there. Without the support and the faith of the ordinary people the LTTE cannot survive.

There is no room for the LTTE infiltrators to destabilise the East or North as both the military and public keep a sharp eye on them.

Q: What would be the future of the LTTE?

A: I do not think that there is a future for the LTTE and Prabhakaran's day dream is no more.

Q: Do you mean that the LTTE would not raise its head again?

A: Future is no future for the LTTE. And Sri Lanka military would ensure that there is no future for the LTTE. The LTTE will be forgotten by everybody soon.

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