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LAST BATCH OF TIGER CADRES BOXED BY ADVANCING TROOPS:

Tiger leader counts his final hours



Ranil WIJAYAPALA

terrorism.

Therefore, not only the Sri Lankan nation but also the entire world is now eagerly waiting to see what LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran would do in his final hours inside his illusionary kingdom reduced to a tiny plot of land in the sandy terrain of Mullaitivu coast at the time this newspaper went to press.



Pix: Rukmal Gamage

The situation was changing so fast and anything would have happened within the few hours with the dawn of the day as all the signs of an end game were visible inside the No Fire Zone within the past 48-hour period in which thousands of civilians deserted the Tiger held terrain, ending their years long imprisonment by the LTTE.

So, the international community, who were very much concerned about the plight of the civilians trapped inside the NFZ, would have seen how they were fleeing from the Tiger grip taking the first available chance.



It was so pathetic that those civilians who were under LTTE detention for months were fleeing, after crossing the Nanthikadal lagoon with the help of whatever the floating instrument they had with them.

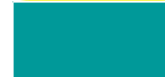
The live visuals of this tragic scene would be an eye opener to those vested, interested parties who made desperate attempts to hold the Security Forces responsible for the civilian casualties inside the NFZ, as they could see how LTTE was firing towards those innocent civilians crossing the Nanthikadal lagoon hanging onto whatever floating equipment they had.

The so-called world leaders, who obliquely put the blame on the Security Forces for violating the commitment they made not to use heavy calibre weapons during military operations, would have witnessed that it was not

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due to any use of heavy calibre weapons but due to direct firing by the LTTE towards the fleeing civilians that had caused such a panic inside the NFZ.

They could have witnessed how our Security Forces were risking their lives to rescue those innocent civilians even though they were aware of the fact that it was the same civilians who had once backed the LTTE. But those, who were observing things so remotely, could not understand the humane qualities of the Sri Lankans when it come to a tragic situation. The so-called Westerners, who have been confined to their selfish mentalities, would never be able to understand the way our people are treating those innocent civilians donating whatever resources they have.

The civilians, who had been entrapped inside the NFZ, got the opportunity of fleeing towards military controlled areas since last Tuesday. It was after the 59 Division troops now under the command of Brigadier Prasanna Silva advanced towards Northward from the Mullaitivu Forward Defence Line.

It was the first time the troops of the 59 Division commenced advancing towards the NFZ from south to north. It was under the supervision of Brigadier Chagie Gallage the defence lines of the 59 Division was strengthened to face any counter attack or any attempt by the LTTE to infiltrate into the Mullaitivu jungles through a sea landing.

During the short period of time Brigadier Chagie Gallage was handling operational matters of the 59 Division, measures were taken to reduce the water level of the Nanthikadal lagoon so that the troops can easily operate in the lagoon front and to avoid any boat movements by the LTTE.

It was during that period, steps were also taken to connect the lagoon front where the LTTE was operating with the western edge of the lagoon by a huge rope. Troops engaged in reece missions also used this rope to cross the lagoon from one end to the other. The civilians fleeing from Safe Zone were able to cross the lagoon with the help of this rope.

Those steps taken by the 59 Division troops under the command of Brigadier Gallage greatly helped the troops to rescue the civilians from the southern part of the Safe Zone.

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

The 59 Division had 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 in the Jordanian merchant vessel Fara III which has been grounded closer to Mullaitvu shores few years back.

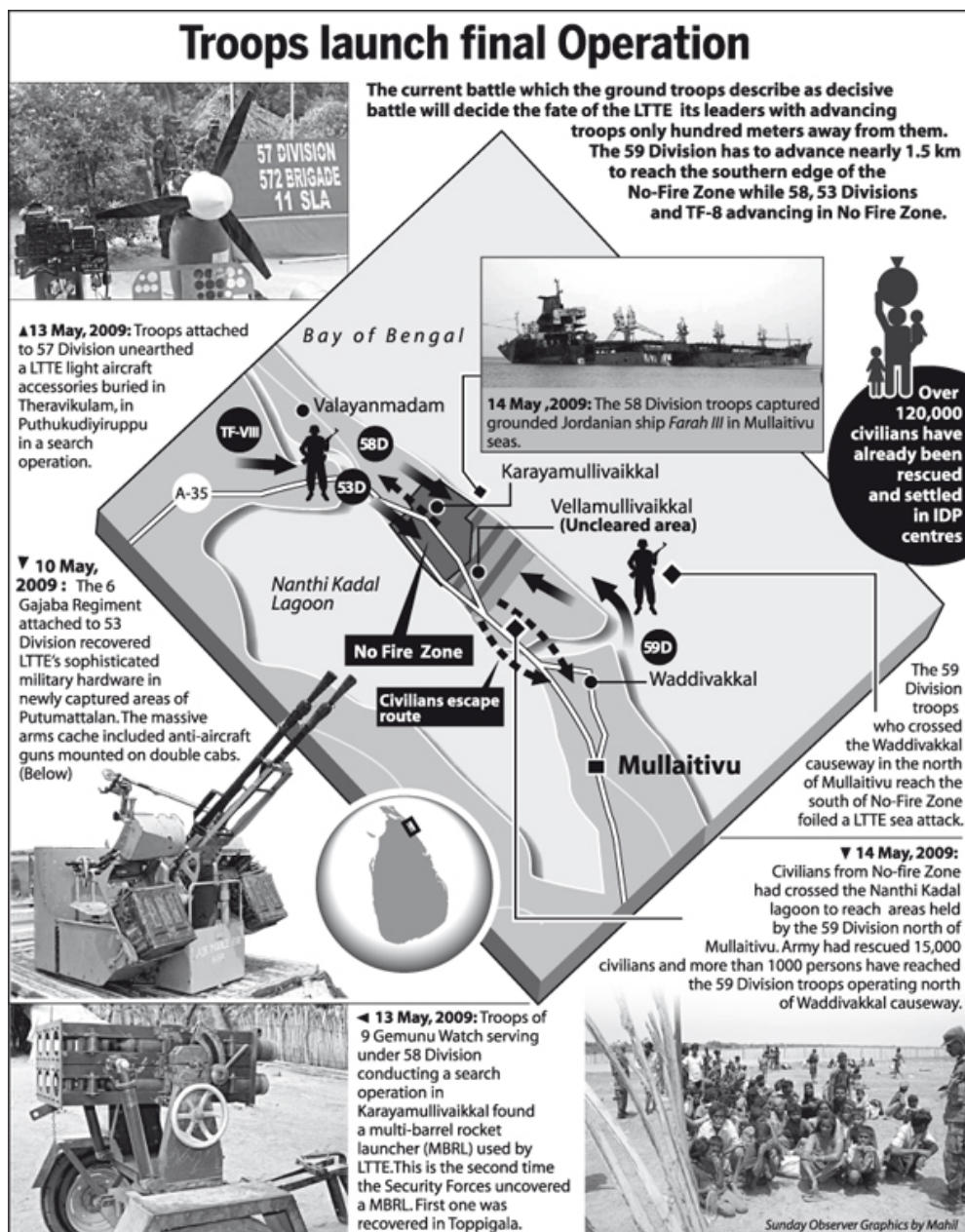
The capture of the Tiger earth bund in the southern edge by the ground troops, increased the threat on the LTTE by two fold as they earlier had to face the troops only from the Northern front.

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 had also 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 had 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, South of Karayamullivaikkal 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.

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.

It was on Thursday afternoon troops made a major breakthrough rescuing nearly 4,000 civilians from the Safe Zone. As civilians were reaching towards the 59 Division crossing the Nanthikadal lagoon, the 58 Division reached towards the Fara III ship from the beach front captured after fierce battle with the LTTE.

The capture of the Farah III Jordanian vessel was a major breakthrough for the ground troops and also for the Naval troops operating in the sea off Mullaitivu as it was used by the LTTE direct fire towards the ground troops and also towards the Naval boats operating there.

The Jordanian cargo vessel developed engine trouble in the sea off Mullaitivu when it was transporting 14,000 Metric tons of rice from India to South Africa when Sea Tigers held the 25 crew members and looted the ship. On Friday the troops attached to 58 Division advanced further southwards and recovered huge stocks of arms and ammunition from the Tiger bases in Karaynamullivaikkal area. Thousands of civilians, who were living in Karayanmullivaikkal Tsunami village were rescued by the troops. On Friday alone more than 10,000 civilians arrived in military controlled areas towards 53, 58 and 59 Division areas.

Even the family members of the Tiger leaders arrived in Government controlled areas mingling with the fleeing civilians.

The family members of the Sea Tiger leader Soosai were also captured by the Naval troops operating in the Mullaitivu sea. It was around 2 a.m. on Friday that Naval troops detected this boat and arrested the civilians on board.

Later it was revealed that two sons of Soosai, his wife, his mother-in-law and his relatives were arrested by the Navy As civilians fled the Safe Zone, the LTTE cadres trapped inside the sandy terrain in Mullaitivu North, blasted their bases and ammunitions dumps before being captured by the advancing troops.

The exodus of civilians continued to flow into the military controlled areas yesterday too as ground troops further encircled the Tiger territory as of yesterday morning.

It was on Saturday morning the 58 Division and the 59 Division troops linked together in the Mullaitivu beach front after 11 Sri Lanka Light Infantry battalion under the command of Lt. Colonel Kithsiri Ekanayake from the 58 Division and the 11 Gemunu Watch battalion under the command of Lt. Colonel Tishantha Fernando linked up around 7.30 a.m. yesterday.

It was a historic moment for the 58 Division which commenced operations from the Mannar front having cleared the entire North Western coast from Mannar to Pooneryn reaching towards the Mullaitvu coast after advancing from the West to East.

That was the longest march any offensive Division had made during the three-years long effort by the Security Forces to defeat the LTTE. As troops sealed off the entire Eastern coast, the last chances available for the LTTE leaders trapped inside the NFZ to flee from the country via sea, was totally denied to them.