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All civilians freed

Ranil Wijayapala in Mullaitivu

*Over 82,000 civilians sought refuge in Forces since May 14

*The old, maimed and the wounded were last to come

The humanitarian mission launched to liberate civilians taken hostage by the LTTE for months reached an end last afternoon in Mullaitivu with the last batch of civilians arriving in Government controlled areas through the Vadduvakkal causeway towards Mullaitivu by 2.30 p.m yesterday whilst troops surrounded the last batch of Tiger cadres inside a less than half square kilometre stretch in the No Fire Zone.

The last batch of civilians, included the old, maimed and wounded.

Many of them without any helping hand were seen creeping and crawling across the Vadduvakkal causeway while many disabled and wounded on clutches and wheelchairs made their last bid effort to join thousands of the other civilians fleeing from the Safe Zone at the last minute.

These civilians were screened by the troops as they crossed the Vadduvakkal causeway whilst hundreds of Tiger cadres declared their identities to the Security Forces.

According to Military officials more than 52,000 civilians have arrived in the Government controlled areas and nearly 30,000 were due to be screened by the troops before being dispatched to welfare centres in Vavuniya.

The troops were seen extending a helping hand to the needy and wounded and innocent children by providing water and fresh meals as they arrived in military controlled areas.

"An estimated figure exceeding 82,000 civilians have so far arrived in the military controlled areas since May 14," military officials in Mullaitivu added.

As the last batch of civilians were fleeing from the Safe Zone, many explosions were heard inside the No Fire Zone as troops were fighting with the last batch of Tiger cadres trapped inside.

Ground troops of the 58 Division commanded by Brigadier Shavendra Silva, 53 Division commanded by Major General Kamal Gunaratne and 59 Division commanded by Brigadier Prasanna Silva tightened the grip on the last remaining Tiger cadres after 53 Division troops and the 59 Division troops linked together in the Eastern edge of the Nanthikadal lagoon yesterday morning.

Earlier on Saturday, the 58 Division and the 59 Division linked up together in the beach front sealing off the entire beach front for the LTTE. According military officials, Sea Tiger leader Soosai and other leaders Jeyam and Bhanu were fighting inside the last stretch of terrain inside the No Fire Zone.

But there was no information about Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran inside the Safe Zone.

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