



NEWS

NEWS FEATURES

INTERVIEWS

POLITICAL COLUMN

THIS IS MY NATION

MILITARY MATTERS

EDITORIAL

SPORTS

CARTOON

BUSINESS

EYE - FEATURES

LETTERS

EVENTS

SOUL - YOUTH MAG

KIDS - NATION

ENTERTAINMENT

NATION SPECIAL

Military Matters

[WANNI UPDATE](#)
[24 JANUARY 2008](#)

UN-LTTE standoff in Wanni

As the standoff between the UN and the LTTE, which began on Thursday, over the latter's refusal to allow 17 of its local staff, along with 78 of their dependants, to leave the fast shrinking Tiger held territory, dragged on at Pudukudyirippu, Wanni Security Forces (SF) Commander Maj. Gen. Jagath Jayasuriya said yesterday that his men had halted firing their big guns in consideration of the safety of about 200,000 civilians held captive there by the Tigers as a human shield.



In the eastern edge of the Udyarkattukulam tank bund troops recovered a mine factory, full of chemicals, explosives and other metal items, needed for manufacture of deadly mines

Gen. Jayasuriya, however, accused the LTTE of continuing to fire its heavy artillery from the Safety Zone for trapped civilians announced by the Army on Wednesday, in violation of all civilised norms.

Early this week, there had been civilian casualties as a result of firefights between the Army and the Tigers. By yesterday, advancing troops from all fronts had reduced the Tiger held territory to less than 280 sq. km., from approximately 450 sq. km it held at the beginning of the week. These estimates pertain to land areas still under Tiger control and do not include water bodies like tanks within them.

UN staff held hostage

UN's Chief Spokesman in Colombo James Elder told The Nation that, the last two international staff members of the organisation, a Bangladeshi and an Australian too, remained at Pudukudyirippu with the local staff and their dependants who are not being allowed to leave and all negotiations with the LTTE so far in that regard had failed.

Elder said the standoff was part of a much bigger picture of the LTTE not allowing several hundred thousand people trapped there to leave the area. "So, we are using all the leverage we possibly can use for the past few weeks, in vigorously trying to lobby the LTTE to allow those people to leave."

He said that the UN staff and their dependants were unable to proceed beyond the Tiger checkpoint at Pudukudyirippu and the UN was extremely concerned of its staff.

In addition to the above two UN international staff members, the ICRC too continues to employ five expatriates in its humanitarian work in the Wanni.

The UN, on January 16, publicly called on the LTTE to allow civilians move freely to areas where they feel most secure and for the Government to receive newly displaced people, according to internationally agreed principles.

The appeal was made by UN Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs & Emergency Relief Coordinator John Holmes. A somewhat similar appeal was also issued by the ICRC. But all such requests have so far been ignored by the LTTE.

The latest Army declared Safety Zone for civilians trapped in Wanni, comprises a four kilometer long stretch to the north of Udayarakattu Junction and the Yellow Bridge on the A-35 Pudukudyirippu-Paranthan main road up to Iruthumadu and another eight kilometers long area from the south of Iruthumadu up to Thevapuram(see map).

The eight fighting Divisions battling the LTTE in Wanni are advancing towards Vishvamadu and Pudukudyirippu Tiger strongholds in Mullaithivu from all directions.

Closing in

The LTTE terrorists now trapped in an area less than 300 sq. kilometers, are attempting to use the civilians as a human shield to obstruct the advancing forces.

Meanwhile, an operation to capture an area of about 30 kilometers along the Mullaithivu coast also began on Thursday morning and 55 Brigade under Brig. Prasanna de Silva broke into the LTTE Forward Defence Line (FDL) at Chundikulam estuary. The 55 Brigade had been instructed to consolidate their positions along the Mullaithivu beaches. Brig. Prasanna De Silva and his 2IC, Brig. Nissanka Ranawana, with other officers, planned the operation. Col. Kapila Udalupeetha commanding 55-2 Brigade too, joined them in this task. The troops involved in the operation, however, found it extremely difficult to swim across the 80ft. wide and 25 ft deep estuary or across the lagoon, especially due to strong currents and whirlpools. The distance to the other bank of the lagoon under the LTTE control was about 400 metres.

The 1st Gemunu Regiment under Lt. Col. Ajantha Wijesuriya and the Alpha Team under Capt. Wickrema erected five bunkers in the direction of Jaffna to escape from LTTE mortar and artillery fire. The next challenge facing them was to erect a bridge to cross the estuary.

They used 60 catamarans found in abandoned LTTE camps in Veththilaikarni beach captured earlier by the SF. The 6th

Engineering Regiment under Maj. Mahinda Jayawardene erected a makeshift 100 ft. long bridge within two days, by joining the catamarans.

Lt. Jayaratne, who swam across the lagoon, battling the strong currents with divers of the first Special Forces Brigade, gathered intelligence on the LTTE positions, to launch the assault.

A platoon under Maj. Sanka Jayamaha of the 1st Commando Regiment was assigned the task of ferrying the forces across the lagoon. The Bravo Group of the First Infantry Regiment under Maj. Chandana Jayaweera was instructed to accompany the Commando Group in boats to the Tiger held side of the estuary and to erect bunkers in the LTTE stronghold.

They secretly erected five bunkers, using railway sleepers and polythene bags ferried across the lagoon by boats seized from the LTTE camps, and returned to the other bank in the dead of night, after carrying out the assigned task. The distance from the bunkers to the LTTE FDL was less than 300 metres. About 70 LTTE cadres had been stationed in 10 bunkers, in an attempt to hold back the advancing forces.

It was in the morning that the LTTE noticed the military bunkers covered with a cadjan fence. The bunkers deserted by the forces came under mortar and artillery fire of the LTTE. The bunkers were intended to protect the soldiers crossing the estuary from mortar fire.

Charlie Group under Capt. Darshana Boyagane of the 8th Vijeyaba Regiment commanded by Lt. Col. Nalin Koswatta, and the Delta Group under Capt. Shyaman Silva and divided into eight-man teams, was preparing to cross the lagoon. A Multi Barrel Rocket Launcher (MBRL) was also kept ready.

At about 9.30 a.m. on Thursday, they fired a salvo from the MBRLs, almost at level with the ground, for the first time in this war. Though this MBRL was able to take targets as far as 20 kms away, here it was used against targets at a distance of about 400 metres. This devastating salvo was followed by heavy and light machine gun fire, until the LTTE bunkers were reduced to rubble. Under the cover of the intense fire that lasted about an hour, eight-man teams from the 8th Vijeyaba Regiment took off in boats towards the LTTE bunkers, and in the early hours of the following day, entered the LTTE bunkers amidst heavy gunfire from the Sea Tiger cadres and the Charles Anthony Brigade, who fiercely defended this main Tiger defence line towards Mullaithivu. But heavy counter fire forced the seasoned Tiger fighters to retreat, while fighting back in small groups as they retreated.

The other troops of 55 Brigade that moved forward along the makeshift bridge, consolidated their advance to a distance of more than one kilometer by the same evening

It was confirmed that the bodies of the LTTE cadres who died during the confrontations and the injured were carried in two tractors. The SF recovered two bodies and five firearms, a hand grenade and a communication set. At least 30 LTTE cadres were killed in the confrontations.

The SF recovered a 40ft-long Sea Tiger craft, similar to a Dvora, an armour plated vehicle and two tractors hidden under a camouflage net, from the nearby jungles.

Only one soldier of the 55 Brigade was killed and four others injured in the entire operation. The advancing forces that broke down the LTTE FDL, are now consolidating their positions along the Mullaithivu beaches.

LTTE birthplace overrun

Dharmapuram, considered the LTTE's birthplace, was liberated for the first time in the history of the Eelam War, by the 58 Brigade under Brig. Shavendra Silva. One of the Tiger's main fuel storage facilities, its operational headquarters and an underground bunker said to have been one of the hiding places of Velupillai Prabhakaran, were found in Dharmapuram.

About 75,000 litres of diesel and kerosene in barrels had been buried in this large fuel storage facility at Dharmapuram, which was about five acres in extent.

"Only the UN was allowed to transport diesel into this area, and as to how the LTTE acquired this stock of diesel is a very good question. However, we managed to seize the entire stock, along with a rice store belonging to the LTTE, at a most unexpected moment," a senior military officer in the battlefield said.

"The underground operational headquarters here is similar to the military operational headquarters. We found the maps of Batticaloa, Trincomalee, Mannar, Welioya, Vavuniya and Jaffna, with the locations of all military bases and camps, and their FDLs clearly marked. Their operational headquarters with a meeting hall had been used as the main rendezvous point of the leaders planning strategy. The building complex was camouflaged with cadjans," he said.

"A bomb making factory was also located in the area. We recovered Johnny anti-personnel mines manufactured here and a new type of incendiary device made with empty Coca Cola bottles stuffed with rice chaff and explosives and fitted with detonator wire. We had never seen this kind of bombs" said another officer.

58 Brigade, that captured the Dharmapuram LTTE base extending to some four sq. kms., had to face much resistance to cross the canal separating Dharmapuram and Vishvamadu. However, they entered the Vishvamadu area by January 21. Military Intelligence confirmed that 93 LTTE cadres were killed during the confrontations that lasted six days. The advancing forces recovered more than 30 bodies of terrorists.

Trapped

Senior military officials were under the impression that the civilians in the LTTE's grip would flee the area, when the forces entered Vishvamadu.

Intense fighting erupted when the forces were proceeding towards Vishvamadu and several other units advanced towards the Jaffna lagoon. The SF recovered a backhoe, a bulldozer, a road roller, two tipper lorries, and four tractors used to build their defence lines. The 58 Division liberated a village called Puliampokkanai during the operation. Intense fighting was continuing in the region.

The 7th Sinha, 2nd Commando, 11th Infantry, 17th Gemnu, 12th Gajaba, 9th Gemunu, 10th Gajaba and 6th Sinha Regiments took part in battles launched by the 58 Division. The three Brigades 57-1, 57-2, and 57-4, of the 57 Brigade under Maj. Gen. Jagath Dias were heading for Mullaithivu from the direction of Ramanathanpuram.

Meanwhile, the 57-1 Brigade commanded by Lt. Col. Harendara Ranasinghe was advancing in the direction of

Kalmadukulam amid intense fighting. The 9th Gajaba Regiment under Col. Chandana Somaweera, the 4th Sinha Regiment under Maj. Hiran Lokuketagoda, and the 9th Vijeyaba Regiment under Lt. Col. Sisisira Herath are involved in this operation. The 9th Gajaba Regiment that captured the Kalmadukulam tank bund, came under continuous artillery and mortar fire, in an attempt to secure the release of a prominent LTTE leader Raghu and his group entrapped among the SF personnel. Maj. Gen. Jagath Dias instructed the forces to besiege the area, while the LTTE was attempting to save their men.

When Raghu and his group were attempting slip through the cordon MBRL salvos were directed at them. The SF recovered two machine guns, eight T-56 rifles, and a T-81 weapon during the search operation that followed. The forces had overheard Raghu's messages identified by the code name "Mike- Alpha" confirming that 10 of his men were killed during the confrontation.

However, a valiant SNCO of the Gajaba Regiment, Sgt U.S. Yasaratne from Ratgama in Galle, was killed in this operation and a brave Capt. Thushan Dassanayaka of the 57 Division injured in an artillery blast.

Relentless advance

The Infantry Regiments of the 57-4 Brigade under Lt. Col. Senaka Wijesuriya and the 57-2 Brigade under Lt. Col. Dhammika Jayasundara, were proceeding along Paranthan-Mullaitivu (A-35) route, towards Vishvamadu.

The 621 and 622 Brigades of Task Force II under Brig. Rohana Bandara, captured several LTTE camps, hospitals and vehicles during an operation on Jan. 20, in the Pudukudirippu area.

621 Brigade under Lt. Col. Atula Ariyaratne and 622 Brigade under Lt. Col. Jayantha Seneviratne, captured a hospital with 12 beds, a camp complex with five buildings and an air-conditioned container.

"The air-conditioned container with a bathroom and covered with a camouflage net had been used by a prominent LTTE leader" said a military officer in the front.

An SF unit that destroyed a double-cab van fitted with communication equipment, recovered the bodies of four LTTE cadres onboard. In another incident, the SF attacked a tractor transporting LTTE cadres and recovered four bodies. The 8th Sinha Regiment under Lt. Col. Priyantha Jayawardene, the 7th Signal Regiment, under Maj. Dhammika Tilakaratne, the 6th Vijeyaba Regiment under Maj. Prabhath Kodituwakku, and the 8th Gajaba Regiment under Maj. Chandana Wickremesinghe, joined the battle.

Intense fighting erupted between the LTTE and the 621 Brigade under Col. Athula Ariyaratne that passed Utthiyankattukulam and was proceeding towards Udayarkattukulam.
