
A9 highway gears for non-stop run

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By Dhaneshi YATAWARA The Alpha 9 of Sri Lanka or better known as A9 road is progressing to return to her busy schedule like in those good old days. It not only connects two different cities but it heralds peace and harmony of two different ethnicities. A peaceful A9 symbolizes a traditional bond between the North and the South of our motherland. The A9 was closed in 1984 when the LTTE attacked the Pooneryn defences of the Sri Lanka Army which posed a threat to the Elephant Pass. Years later, the A9 was reopened on 8 April 2002 after the Ceasefire Agreement between the Government and the LTTE was concluded. Again in 2006, while the truce was in operation, the A9 had to be closed down due to the massive LTTE attack on Muhamalai entry exit point.

Fight to save A9 The emergence of paramilitary organisations in the country witnessed a rapid escalation of terrorist activities. It posed a serious threat to the A9 road which was the major link that connects the so-called 'mono-ethnic Eelam State' with the southern part of the country. On January 19, 1985 the Colombo bound 'Yal Devi' train was destroyed by a landmine attack at Murukandi killing civilian passengers. Reinforcements and rescue teams of the Army were rushed to the scene from Kokavil, Mankulam and Elephant Pass camps. It was real carnage where the passengers were crushed to death. Later it was revealed that the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO) was responsible for the gruesome attack. Definite victory Out of the series of operations conducted by the Army since 1985 up to date, the one that was launched to clear a land route to Jaffna was 'Operation Jayasikuru'. Operation 'Jayasikuru' (definite victory) was launched in May 1997 under the operational command of Maj. Gen. A. K. Jayawardhana with the aim of opening a land route to Jaffna. Due to stiff resistance from the LTTE, the Army had to continue the operation up to end of 1998 until the capture of Mankulam. Jaffna secured The 'Operation Riviresa' launched on October 17, 1995 to regain Jaffna was a landmark achievement for the Sri Lanka Army. 'Riviresa' was launched under the overall command of Major General Rohan Daluwatte. The 51 division was commanded by Brigadier Neil Dias with Brigadier Sarath Fonseka as his deputy. 52 division was commanded by Brigadier P.A. Karunatilake with Brigadier Anton Wijendra as his deputy. The troops met with heavy resistance from the very beginning. Yet, the two brigades moved on in two fronts to the town and finally the town was captured on December 2, 1995. The second phase of Operation Riviresa was to liberate Thennamarachchi area and the third was to wrest control of the Vadamarachchi area. The loss of Jaffna was a serious blow to the LTTE's prestige. Liberation For the Army the next phase was capturing Paranthan and Kilinochchi. Hence, Operation 'Sathjaya' was launched from Elephant Pass. The 53 Division under Maj. Gen. Neil Dias successfully regained Paranthan junction. Amidst stiff resistance, the troops captured Kilinochchi through operation 'Sathjaya' I and II. 'Operation Liberation' targeted the recapture of Jaffna. It was planned to clear the areas in the Jaffna peninsula stage by stage inflicting maximum damage to the terrorists and their logistical facilities. Troops organized into three brigades and the key figures in this operation were Brigadier Denzil Kobbekaduwa and Colonel Wijeya Wimalaratne. Other brigade was under the command of Brigadier G.H. de Silva. Stage I of the operation successfully liberated the Vadamarachchi area in the Peninsula. It was considered a personal defeat to LTTE strongman, Prabhakaran. Peace Keeping Force The second stage of the operation was launched to capture the city of Jaffna until the Indian planes dropped food over Jaffna (Operation Poomalai) on June 04, 1987. After much diplomatic shuttles between Colombo and New Delhi the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord was signed in 1987. The Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) entered Sri Lanka soon after the accord. Sri Lankan troops withdrawn from Vadamarachchi were air-lifted to Colombo and other parts of the island. The IPKF was later compelled to launch a military offensive to disarm the LTTE. Both Brigadier (later Lieutenant General) Denzil Kobbekaduwa and Colonel (later Major General) Vijaya Wimalaratne were killed in August 8, 1992, when they were making preparations for an operation to capture the Jaffna Peninsula. Elephant Pass in 1991 On July 10, 1991 the Army camp at Elephant Pass came under siege by the LTTE. The army base commanded by the then Major Sanath Karunaratne defended the camp. The battle for Elephant Pass turned to be the most violent and bloody confrontation between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan armed forces. Meanwhile with the change of command which took place in mid July 1990, Maj. Gen. Denzil Kobbekaduwa was made responsible for overall operations in the Northern province. This was the period of Eelam war II. The army troops valiantly withstood the ferocious enemy attack. At this decisive moment, Lance Corporal Gamini Kularatna of the 6 Sinha Regiment managed to climb on top of an advancing bulldozer and lobbed a grenade. He sacrificed his precious life for the defence of the motherland. Major Lalith Buddhadasa, the second in command of the base too was killed along with a few other soldiers by a mortar attack. To break the siege and reinforce the Elephant Pass camp Maj. Gen. Kobbekaduwa, along with Brigadier Vijaya Wimalaratne, launched "Operation Balavegaya". Brigades 1 and 3, commanded by Colonel Sarath Fonseka and Colonel Anton Wijendra respectively headed for an amphibious attack to regain Elephant Pass. Prabhakaran's much publicized, 'Mother of all Battles,' was defeated. The meticulously planned defence of the Elephant Pass camp was a great morale boost to the Army. 2002 truce A drastic change took place as a result of the Norwegian brokered 2002 Ceasefire between the Sri Lanka Government and the LTTE. The Security Forces had to withdraw from areas they gained control during previous operations. The ceasefire was however abrogated with thousands of LTTE violations of its provisions. After the Eastern liberation, the most successful operation to regain the A9 road was launched. The aim of the Army, under the command of Lt. Gen. Sarath Fonseka was to inflict maximum damage to LTTE military capabilities while protecting the civilians in the war-affected areas. Sandwiched between the Northern Forward Defence Line and the Wannu Forward Defence Line, the terrorists faced nothing but defeat and frustration. Worst battle The Northern Front was commanded by Maj. Gen. G. A. Chandrasiri while the Wannu FDL was under the command of Maj. Gen. Jagath Jayasooriya. Later with Maj. Gen. Chandrasiri being posted to Colombo to assume duties as Chief of Staff, Maj. Gen. Mendaka Samarasinghe succeeded him to take the charge of Northern Command. According to senior military officials, the worst battle was the one targeting to capture Kilinochchi. With the Task Force 3 capturing Mankulama on November 17, 2008, the present operation was

launched to secure the direct control of the A9 road. The second hit was on December 01, 2008 when the 57 Division commanded by Maj. Gen. Jagath Dias captured Kokavil town on the A9 road. Again on December 10, the same Division took over the control of A9 at Terumurukandi. Task Force 4 commanded by Colonel Nishantha Wanniarachchi captured Nedunkerni on December 20. The 57 Division commanded by Maj. Gen. Jagath Dias successfully captured the Kilinochchi township and its surroundings by January 02, 2009. The 53 and 55 Divisions respectively commanded by Brigadier (now Maj. Gen.) Kamal Gunaratne and Brigadier Prasanna de Silva moved southward clearing the path up to Elephant Pass while the 58 Division commanded by Brig. Shavendra Silva progressed towards it from the Wannu front line after capturing Paranthan on January 01. By January 10 with the troops linking up at Elephant Pass the A9 road came under the full control of the Government. Thus a new chapter was opened in the history of the island nation in its war against terrorism! Courtesy: Sundayobserver.lk