Gotabhaya says progress slow but steady

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by Shamindra Ferdinando Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa yesterday said that the army was engaged in close quarter combat with the LTTE on the eastern flank. "We are making significant progress although the civilian presence will cause delays," he told The Island yesterday.

Responding to our queries, he said that battles were taking place in an area about five km north to south and about three km west to east in the Mullaitivu district. In fact, the area actually under terrorist control was very much less than 35 sq. km he mentioned regularly, he said. He likened the battle for remaining LTTE-held territory to the one waged by the army in 1995 to liberate Jaffna. He said that two lagoons and the civilian safety zone, too, were located within the 35 sq. km area. According to him, the army was pushing LTTE units on several flanks and gaining ground. He dismissed assertions that small groups of infiltrators would hinder the army’s progress. The LTTE’s collapse, the former Gajaba officer said was imminent, urging the people to be a little bit patience until the armed forces finished off the LTTE. He said that people held hostage by the LTTE would be able to escape as the army overrun the last enemy defences. The LTTE wouldn’t be able to stop the civilian exodus by force, he said, adding that 14 internally displaced persons had received gun shot injuries as they fled towards army-held positions over the weekend. According to him altogether 592 civilians had reached government lines on Saturday. The ICRC had evacuated a further 437 persons from the LTTE-held area.Courtesy:Island.lk