
Over 2,000 civilians escape as LTTE 'police' station is set ablaze

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by Shamindra Ferdinando Angry civilians Tuesday set fire to an LTTE 'police' station at Puthumathalan in the civilian safety zone after LTTE cadres shot dead parents of a child whom they made an abortive bid to abduct. They also shot dead the child before retreating amid violent protests, Navy spokesman Captain D. K. P. Dassanayake told The Island last night.

Quoting civilians who had taken advantage of the chaos triggered by the killings and the retaliatory civilian attack on the LTTE post to escape, Dassanayake said that the LTTE was on the verge of collapse. Several civilians are believed to have been killed during the incident. Brigadier Udaya Nanayakkara told The Island that the area under LTTE control inclusive of the civilian safety zone was now down to about 28 sq. km. Dassanayake said that civilians had urged ICRC staff on the ground to stop bringing in fresh supplies to the civilian safety zone, instead evacuate them immediately. The ICRC remains the only INGO active in the LTTE-held area since the government removed all others last September. The ICRC is facilitating government and international efforts to move in supplies to the civilian safety zone. Responding to The Island queries, the navy spokesman said that over 2,000 civilians had escaped during Tuesday's chaos. The majority of them had escaped and reached the 58 Division troops deployed in the Puthukudirippu area. According to Brigadier Udaya Nanayakkara, 1565 men, women and children had reached the Army lines on Tuesday. On the previous day, the 58 Division had received 447 civilians. Separately, 31 civilians had surrendered to the 59 Division deployed in Mullaitivu area. Dassanayake said that the Navy deployed off the north-eastern coast Tuesday night intervened to rescue 643 civilians, the largest number of people escaping the LTTE-held area in fibre glass dinghies. "Once our land-based radar detected a large cluster of boats around 9 p.m. we directed naval units to the area," he said adding that they thwarted an LTTE attempt to intercept dinghies. The Navy had monitored Sea Tiger leader Soosai ordering four sea going units to shoot at the dinghies carrying civilians. Dassanayake said that the SBS (Special Boat Squadron) and RABS (Rapid Action Boat Squadron) had engaged the four craft and forced them to retreat. According to him, the last of the 35 dinghies had reached Point Pedro around noon on Wednesday. Among the rescued were 320 adults (207 males and 212 females) and 323 children (111 boys and 113 girls). Dassanayake said that according to an escapee, the total number of people held by the LTTE could be around 50,000. Courtesy: Island.lk