

## LTTE leadership in crisis as Prabhakaran suffers bouts of manic depression

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Pottu Amman and Soosai directing Tiger cadres in battlefront With the Sri Lankan Army advancing into their last stronghold, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam are facing grave difficulties in their attempt to slow down the army's progress in what could be safely termed the last phase of the Eelam war. Among the many difficulties assailing the LTTE are shortage of arms and trained cadres, lack of proper military planning and especially the weak leadership. With the rapid advance of the troops, the LTTE leadership has become very weak, in the recent past, according to the former LTTE cadres, who fled to the cleared areas. Due to the situation, several leaders were reportedly under house arrest including former LTTE military spokesman Ilanthariyan and Peace Secretariat Head Pulidevan. Now no one knows the whereabouts of these two senior leaders. It was learnt that they were captured while attempting to flee the area

Also it has been reported that the health condition of LTTE Leader Velupillai Prabhakaran was getting worse as he was under severe mental stress due to the current war situation. Several senior LTTE cadres who surrendered to the military have stated that none of the LTTE leaders could prevent the successive defeats suffered by the LTTE and this had weakened their leadership prowess. According to those surrendered cadres who had seen Prabhakaran on several occasions last week, before they fled, believed he was now hiding inside the government declared 'Safe Zone' mingling among the civilians. It is also learnt that physically he is completely changed as his illness has made him fat and heavy. According to those cadres it is difficult to identify him at first sight due to these physical changes resulting from ill health. They also stated that several doctors were with him to provide him medication. Fifty-four (54) year-old Prabhakaran is also suffering from high blood pressure and chronic diabetes. Because of this there had been instances where Prabhakaran had been suffering bouts of manic depression and this was seriously affecting his ability to lead. In fact the cadres who had fled also revealed that the entire battle against the advancing army is now being conducted by LTTE's Spy Chief Pottu Amman and Sea Tiger leader Soosai. Due to his health condition Prbhakaran has assigned them to lead in the battlefront. However there had been occasions when Prabhakaran mingled with civilians to recruit more cadres and also to get battle field details. Forcible recruitment increased. Meanwhile, the second level leadership of the LTTE led by Pottu Amman had increased forcible recruitment of civilians. Pottu Amman and LTTE Political Head B.Nadesan had been seen in Puthumatalan area early this week inside the 'no fire zone' recruiting civilians, according to civilian sources. They had been telling the civilians that the LTTE would soon be able to regain the lost areas and for the purpose, they needed more people. They were also reportedly urging the civilians to help them locate LTTE cadres who had fled the organization. On one occasion, LTTE 'policemen' who are mainly involved in recruiting and punishing civilians had demanded a civilian who wanted antibiotics for an illness that he would only be given the medication if he allowed his son to join the Tigers. According to civilians these incidents are common in the area and all these incidents take place in the presence of ICRC representatives in the area. People have now started blaming the ICRC officials for maintaining silence while witnessing these incidents. They also say that when a food convoy arrives in the 'safe zone' the LTTE takes away a large stock of essential items and medicine forcibly in the presence of ICRC officials. Fleeing LTTE cadres, who surrendered to the military state that after they had seen the large number of civilians injured by LTTE fire had said that if they ever went back to the LTTE-held areas, they would definitely kill several senior LTTE leaders who were treating the civilians so brutally. Accordingly they have a completely different picture about the military and the LTTE now. Price of essential food items rising in uncleared area. With limited number of stocks coming in to uncleared areas, the prices of essential items are on the rise, as the LTTE had opened several shops selling items at a higher price. Accordingly, the selling price of a card of Panadol is Rs. 150, the price of a coconut Rs. 250, one kilo of rice is Rs. 200, betel leaves is Rs. 100, a cake of soap is Rs. 50. Though the government is sending enough food and medicine to the uncleared areas, most of the essential items are being taken away by the LTTE in order to use them or to sell them at higher prices. Due to this situation people are seeking ways to escape the area and the LTTE had circled it in order to prevent any civilian movement. Despite this, people are attempting to flee even under the threat of gun fire from the LTTE. Relatives of the lower level LTTE cadres are also treated in the same manner. Although they are relatives of LTTE members, they too were not given any food by the Tigers. Although most of those LTTE cadres want to flee the organization, the LTTE is denying them the right to do so. There were many cases earlier, where the LTTE had shot and killed a large number of LTTE cadres fleeing the organization. According to civilians, the LTTE cadres who are deployed on the boundary of the safe zone are being paid a large amount of money by the civilians to escape. This money is in turn given by these cadres to their family members to buy food. For instance an LTTE cadre who was policing the boundary line of the Safe Zone had helped a family to escape after taking Rs. 50,000 on Tuesday. They said that this is only one case and there were several more such incidents taking place regularly. They also said that a large number of LTTE cadres wanted to desert the organization but the Tigers were holding their families in custody and are threatening they would be harmed if some one tries to flee. Meanwhile, the LTTE had shot and killed several civilians who were allegedly involved in stabbing and later killing four LTTE policemen who had tried to recruit youth forcibly. So far a large number of civilians have been killed by the LTTE and buried behind the LTTE forward defence line in the 'No fire Zone'. The main purpose in burying these bodies is to tarnish the image of the Sri Lanka Army internationally once the military capture the area. The army can then be blamed stating that the civilians have been massacred by them. These details were revealed to the military by a senior LTTE cadre who surrendered recently. Battlefield progress. On Tuesday, a large number of LTTE cadres stormed the Army's forward defences north of Iranpalai and succeeded in gaining control of it for a few hours. Troops of the 58 Division however repulsed the LTTE offensive and regained control of the area. The LTTE had made an attempt to breach the military forward defences in order to infiltrate the cleared areas. It is not yet confirmed

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whether the LTTE had succeeded in its attempt to infiltrate, but the military suspect that several groups had entered the cleared areas. After several hours of fierce fighting the troops again gained full control of the area causing heavy damage to the LTTE. However, a search operation was subsequently launched in the area by the Special Forces. Earlier, too, a large number of LTTE cadres infiltrated the cleared area using the same point of entry. On that occasion troops were able to kill over a hundred LTTE cadres. Meanwhile, Infantrymen of 7th Sinha Regiment (SR), 8th Gajaba Regiment (GR) and 20th Gajaba Regiment (GR) engaged in intense small arm fire at identified LTTE pockets, forcing the LTTE to flee the area. Over a dozen LTTE bodies were observed left at the battlefield following heavy fighting since 5.30a.m on Wednesday. According to intercepted LTTE communication, four senior LTTE members were reported killed including Kadal, Vardhan Anna, Sooriyan and Eelavan during the confrontations. Troops of the 20th Gajaba Regiment (GR) under the 58 Division have captured a safe house of Pottu Amman, while engaged in counter LTTE operations in the area south of Iranapalai at the Mullaittivu battlefield on Tuesday. According to the military, the safe house was used by both Pottu Amman and Kapil Amman as an operations centre. Soldiers of the 55 Division had taken over at least three earth bunds of the LTTE on the southern edge of Chalai after fierce fighting. There is another massive earth bund for the troops to overrun as they are some two kilometres away from the 'Safe Zone'. The main threat to the 55 Division soldiers was infiltration by the LTTE from the sea. During the last few days the army had killed a large number of LTTE cadres, who were trying to swim their way into the small land stretch on the coast now taken over by the army. Last week, the navy confronted four boats which had a large stock of military items. One more light aircraft remaining with the Tigers. Civilians and ground intelligence sources had revealed that the LTTE is still having a functional light aircraft similar to the two aircraft destroyed in Colombo last month. Civilians had sighted this aircraft on several occasions while being kept under a hut. Following this information authorities are on high alert fearing a possible air threat from this LTTE aircraft. Civilians had also seen repairs being done on the aircraft by the LTTE technicians inside the hut and it seems to be functional, though they have never seen this particular aircraft flying. The LTTE sent two of their aircraft to Colombo on February 20 with the aim of targeting the Air Force Headquarters building in Colombo and the Katunayake Airport base but failed in their attempt due to the anti aircraft fire. During the last few months, advancing troops captured a large number of aircraft parts and models from various locations east of the A-9 main road. These were being used in the process of constructing new aircraft. Security forces found that the LTTE had brought down the sophisticated parts to build a new aircraft. Courtesy: Dailymirror.lk