
Two-pronged assault to decimate Tigers

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Shamindra Ferdinando Amidst LTTE's attempts to force the UN to intervene in Sri Lanka, the Army has carried out a two-pronged assault to tighten its grip on the LTTE trapped on the Mullaitivu coast. Army Chief, Lt. General Sarath Fonseka has ordered the 59 Division, deployed south of the newly established no fire zone, to advance northwards while the 58 Division fought its way into the safety zone amidst heavy LTTE resistance. The ground operations conducted in the past 48 hours had brought the war against the LTTE closer to an end, Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa told The Island.

Well informed sources said that the government wanted to bring the offensive to an immediate end. An attempt would be made to finish off the LTTE units trapped in the safety zone within 48 hours, sources said. Military spokesman Brigadier Udaya Nanayakkara yesterday said that the 59 Division had crossed the LTTE built earth bund cum ditch on Tuesday morning, advanced about 300 metres and was now positioned outside the safety zone. He said only the 58 Division had entered the safety zone so far. Earlier, the Army headquarters shifted Brigadier Prasanna Silva from the 55 Division to 59 Division to spearhead the assault. Army sources based in the North told The Island that 59 Division troops had crossed a bridge at Waduvakkal to secure an area Southeast of Sarvarhottam, adjoining Vellamullavaikkal, where LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran is believed to be hiding. Brigadier Nanayakkara told Tuesday's press conference at the Media Centre for National Security that the entire top leadership had been trapped in the safety zone. Defence Spokesman Minister Keheliya Rambukwella said that there wouldn't be further humanitarian pauses to facilitate movement of civilians. Quoting the Army, he said the final assault would not have taken even 72 hours, had the government ignored the presence of civilians in the area. After the infantry comprising 6 SLLI (Sri Lanka Light Infantry) and 12 SLLI operating under the command of 59 Division had made an initial push into the strongly-defended LTTE-held territory, the elite Special Forces moved in for the kill inflicting heavy damage on the LTTE. The opening up of a new front at the last phase of the offensive would increase pressure on the LTTE, the Army said. The LTTE now trapped in an area as small as five sq. km. would be at the receiving end of ground operations conducted by 58, 53 and 59 Divisions. While the 58 and 59 Divisions traded fire with the LTTE, civilians continued to reach army lines. According to the Army 90 men, women and children had reached the two Divisions by Tuesday afternoon. The army said that the civilians would also be able to reach the 59 Division troops advancing on the north. The Brigadier said that the LTTE had carried out three suicide attacks on the 59 Division causing injuries to some personnel. Brigadier Shavindra Silva's 58 Division has recovered bodies of 25 LTTE cadres along with 20 T-56 assault rifles, one light machine gun and one communication set during its advance into the safety zone. Defence Spokesman Minister Keheliya Rambukwella told the media briefing at the MCNS that a section of the media, particularly international wire services, had become an integral part of the overall LTTE strategy to force UN intervention in Sri Lanka. Had they bothered to verify the much quoted pro-LTTE Tamilnet reports that talked about over 1,000 deaths and injuries to over 1,600 men, women and children allegedly caused by the Army, there wouldn't have been any controversy. Unfortunately, they had facilitated the LTTE strategy knowingly or unknowingly, he said. He accused UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe of being supportive of the LTTE. He claimed that Wickremesinghe had gone overseas to undermine the Sri Lankan State thereby facilitating the LTTE's cause. Courtesy: asianewsnet.net