

Daluwatte assured fullest support of superiors, others. (1995, October 01). *The Sunday times*.



Lt. Gen. Daluwatte on a hearts and mind operation

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When a field commander does not have to look over his shoulder to see whether he is being supported, he can concentrate on the battlefield with much greater assurance and success."

Those were the words of General William Westmoreland who was Commander of the US forces in Vietnam. His remarks came before the US Congress in 1967 when he appealed for more troops.

Almost three decades later, be it in the world's largest Army or the smallest, such elements of unease persist. And Sri Lanka is no exception.

Army Commander, Lt. Gen. Gerry de Silva, flew to Task Force One Headquarters in Palaly on September 22 for a top level conference. He was accompanied by Air Force Commander, Air Marshal Oliver Ranasinghe, Chief of Staff of the Navy, Rear Admiral A.C. Tissera.

In a speech which covered many matters, Lt. Gen. de Silva, laid to rest misgivings, suspicions and rumours that had plagued the military establishment in the past months. He said that Major General Rohan Daluwatte, Overall Operations Commander, the man who was running the military machine enjoyed the fullest confidence of his superiors including himself. He would receive the fullest backing of not only the superiors but also the political leadership.

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The senior officers who were present were told to convey the words of assurances to lower ranks and ensure their morale remained high. Thereafter the conference went on to focus on military matters, which for obvious reasons, cannot be written upon.

But Lt. Gen. de Silva's no-holds-barred speech to lay to rest rumours was significant both in its timing and circumstances. The



By Iqbal Athas

fears he allayed and the suspicions he cleared were not brought about by a psy ops campaign launched by the LTTE.

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With that out of the way, Deputy Defence Minister Anuruddha Ratwatta, toured the north last week talking to officers and men at the battlefield who had re-captured new territory following the launch of operations 'Hand Shake One and Hand Shake Two.

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Col. Ratwatta who has in the recent months spearheaded the task of outlining PA Government's political commitments prompting the crackdown of the LTTE in its own domain, the Jaffna peninsula, has continued to re-iterate the position. He has emphasised that the Government's thrust was to crush the LTTE in the Jaffna peninsula where the movement had reached the advanced phase of a guerrilla war, one of dominating territory.

His assertions have been prompted by apprehensions expressed by some senior security forces officials about the deteriorating security situation in the east. It is widely known that the LTTE has moved into areas from where the security forces have shut down their camps. In some instances, Tiger camps have been set up in the very buildings/ places where security forces camps were located.

According to sources close

to Col. Ratwatta, the Government believes that threats in the east and other areas would recede once the back of the LTTE is broken. They say that it is the LTTE infrastructure in the Jaffna peninsula that helps the guerrillas to destabilise east and other areas.

But there were no doubts over LTTE plans to step up guerrilla activity in the east. It was on last Friday that Tigers attacked the Kalkudah Police Station killing 23 Policemen and leaving eight missing in action. A further 12 were injured.

There have been reports of major build up of Tiger cadres both in the Batticaloa and Trincomalee districts. Whilst this was going on, the Jaffna peninsula was a hive of activity.

Anticipating a security forces offensive, the LTTE has embarked on preparations. Areas outside the Palaly Military Complex have been mined. Civilians living in Valikamam area have been shifted to schools and other buildings in the Vadamarachchi area. Anti-tank ditches are being dug on routes which LTTE perceives the security forces would take.

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The LTTE had acquired weapons including long range artillery and missiles. They also say that the LTTE was setting up field hospitals and training cadres in new weapons.

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