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## 'LTTE stealing medical supplies for own purpose'

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P K Balachandran COLOMBO: Sri Lanka has refuted the charge made by government doctors in the north eastern war-zone, that there is a severe shortage of medicines and surgical material there, and has contended that the medicines and other materials sent were stolen by the Tamil Tiger rebels to run their own "elite hospitals". Health Minister Nimal Sripala de Silva told newsmen here on Tuesday, that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) had been taking three quarters of the materials regularly supplied to the civil hospitals in the areas controlled by them, and had giving only 25 per cent to the intended civilian beneficiaries. The government, he said, had recently appointed 358 doctors and 600 nurses to serve in the troubled northeast. He pointed out that India had set up a 50-bed hospital for refugees at Pulmoddai with 52 qualified Indian personnel, including eight specialists. The minister was referring to news reports of severe shortages, based on a video clipping and a joint letter, which two Regional Directors of Health Services located in the war zone, had written to him. The letter and the video were released on March 17 to the international media by e-mail, by the pro-LTTE and UK based Coordination Office for Humanitarian and Human Rights of Tamils (COHHRT). The letter written by Dr T Varatharajah of Mullaitivu district and Dr T Sathiyamoorthy of Kilinochchi district, said: "less than five per cent of the combined quota of drugs and dressings that are meant for the last quarter of last year and for the first quarter of this year have been sent to us." "Since January 2009, more than 500 civilian deaths, either on or after admission, have been registered at hospitals, and thousands of civilian deaths could have gone unrecorded as they were not brought to the hospitals. Most of them succumbed to the severe war wounds. Most of the hospital deaths could have been prevented if basic infrastructure facilities and essential medicines were made available," the joint letter said. "We have been supplied with no antibiotics, no anaesthetics and not a single bottle of IV fluid, leaving us in a desperate situation of not being able to provide even lifesaving emergency surgery," they said. Courtesy: Expressbuzz.com