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## Captured senior Tamil Tiger urges rebels to surrender

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Taped statements a propaganda coup for Sri Lanka By Stewart Bell, National Post COLOMBO -- A senior member of the Tamil Tigers who surrendered to Sri Lankan troops last week is urging the cornered rebels to lay down their arms. Velayutham "Daya Master" Dayanithi said the Tamil rebels were using civilians as human shields and had fired at those who attempted to flee the war zone.

The "LTTE was keeping the Tamil people as hostages," he said, using the acronym for the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam rebels. "Nearly 200 civilians died due to LTTE fire. LTTE propaganda was that these people died because of military shelling." The Tamil Tigers' former media coordinator, Mr. Dayanithi, who goes by his nom de guerre Daya Master, gave himself up on April 20 after crossing the frontline from the rebel-held area to the government side. He is now detained in Colombo. The National Post viewed a video recording of the interview. It was conducted Saturday under military supervision but he appeared relaxed as he told his story and answered questions on camera. Also interviewed on the hour-long video was George Master, who served as a translator for the Tamil Tigers at peace negotiations between 1995 and 2006. An elderly man with a full white beard, he said he opposed violence and had quit the Tigers after the latest round of talks failed. He said he had wanted to join his daughter in Australia but the rebels would not let him leave. Aided by children, he escaped on foot last week and is now detained in Colombo. He said the remaining Tamil Tigers should "renounce violence, throw away their arms, leave the leader and come to the military-controlled areas." Daya Master said the guerrilla leader Velupillai Prabhakaran seems to believe that if he holds on long enough a foreign country will come to his rescue. "Even after his area of control has been reduced to such a small strip of land, he continues to drag on with the war," he said. "I think it is better Prabhakaran stops this war, lay down arms and bring everything to an end." The comments of the two captives are a propaganda coup for the Sri Lankan military, which is trying to finish off rebels who have waged a battle for Tamil independence that has spanned three decades. The Tamil Tigers are now surrounded in a 10-square-kilometre strip of jungle and sand. With perhaps only days left before the war is finished, the military is facing allegations it has failed to adequately protect civilians and may be guilty of war crimes. The United Nations has reported that as many as 20,000 may have been killed and injured since January, and Tamil protesters in Toronto, Ottawa and other cities have accused the government of genocide. But Daya Master said the demonstrators have it wrong. "I think the Tamil diaspora, particularly the third generation who had never seen their birth places, are engulfed in demonstrations without knowing the ground reality. I think they are being kept in the dark as to the reality prevailing here," he said. He also said that humanitarian aid money sent to Sri Lanka by Tamils living abroad had been misappropriated by the rebels. "These funds have been utilized for military purposes instead of the welfare of the Tamil people," he said. In the past week, 110,000 have escaped the conflict area. They came in a sudden wave after the military blasted a rebel defensive berm. The displaced civilians are being held at camps around the city of Vavunya. The UN believes that up to 50,000 remain in the war zone but the government puts the figure at 15,000-20,000. British Foreign Secretary David Miliband and the French Minister Bernard Kouchner were to arrive in Colombo on Wednesday. They want Sri Lanka to allow humanitarian workers access to the region. Canada has joined other nations in calling for a ceasefire to safeguard the civilians. The Sri Lankan government announced Monday it would no longer use heavy weapons such as artillery or air strikes but that it would continue military operations. The Tigers have accused the military of already breaking its pledge to use only light weapons. Intense fighting continued Tuesday. The military said it had captured two more rebel positions following predawn raids. The rebels had tried to ram troops with an explosive-laden truck in the morning. Troops opened fire at the approaching vehicle, causing it to explode before reaching its target, the military said. Courtesy: Nationalpost.com