
Sri Lanka army: 4 prominent rebel leaders killed

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By Bharatha Mallawarachchi, Associate Press Writer COLOMBO, Sri Lanka – Troops battling the last pockets of rebel resistance in northern Sri Lanka discovered the bodies of four top Tamil Tigers, including the supreme leader's eldest son and the group's political chief, the military said Monday.

But hundreds of special forces troops and infantry soldiers were scouring the smoking war zone for signs of rebel chief Velupillai Prabhakaran and his top deputies, military spokesman Brig. Udaya Nanayakkara said, after the insurgents declared their quarter-century fight had reached its "bitter end." "He's still there in that area, we haven't found him yet," Nanayakkara said. Prabhakaran's capture, dead or alive, is crucial to bringing closure to this war-wracked Indian Ocean island nation. If he were to escape, he could use his large international smuggling network and the support of Tamil expatriates to spark a new round of guerrilla warfare here. During previous rounds of fighting, Prabhakaran has reportedly told his bodyguards to kill him and burn his body beyond recognition rather than allow his capture. Tamil Tiger fighters, as well, have been trained to commit suicide rather than be taken, and many wear cyanide capsules around their necks. Troops were waging gun battles Monday with the last remnants of the rebel group hiding in bunkers in a tiny area about the size of three football fields placed side by side, Nanayakkara said. "Mopping up operations are still going ahead in the area," he said. Earlier, troops found the body of Prabhakaran's eldest son, Charles Anthony — who was reportedly also a leader of the rebel group. Prabhakaran has three children and Charles Anthony — named after a rebel leader who died earlier in the war — was the only one thought to be fighting along with his father. The Defense Ministry said Special Forces also found the bodies of the rebels' political wing leader, Balasingham Nadesan, the head of the rebels' peace secretariat, Seevaratnam Puleedevan, and one of the top military leaders, known as Ramesh. The statement said the bodies of many more rebels were scattered about the area and were not yet identified. The Tamil Tigers were considered one of the world's best armed and most sophisticated insurgencies, with a conventional army, artillery pieces, a significant naval wing and even a nascent air force. But government forces ousted the rebels from the shadow state they controlled across a wide swath of the north in recent months and brought the group to its knees. Thousands of civilians were reportedly killed in the recent fighting. Senior diplomats had appealed for a humanitarian cease-fire in recent weeks to safeguard the tens of thousands of civilians trapped in the war zone, but the government refused and many here grew angry at what they saw as unwanted foreign interference. On Monday, more than a thousand angry Sri Lankans protested outside the British Embassy in Colombo, pelting it with rocks and eggs and burning an effigy of British Foreign Minister David Miliband and throwing it inside the compound. Protesters held posters calling Miliband a "white Tiger," and several tried to climb the embassy's high walls. On Sunday, thousands gathered in the streets of Colombo to dance, sing and let off fireworks as rebel official Selvarasa Pathmanathan admitted the group's defeat. "This battle has reached its bitter end," Pathmanathan said in a statement e-mailed to The Associated Press. "It is our people who are dying now from bombs, shells, illness and hunger. We cannot permit any more harm to befall them. We remain with one last choice — to remove the last weak excuse of the enemy for killing our people. We have decided to silence our guns." In an interview with Britain's Channel 4 news, Pathmanathan said he had spoken with Prabhakaran personally and that the rebel leader remained inside the war zone. The Tamil Tigers are blamed for hundreds of suicide attacks and outlawed as a terror group in the U.S., European Union and India. The rebels have been fighting since 1983 for a separate state for Sri Lanka's ethnic Tamil minority after years of marginalization at the hands of the Sinhalese majority. More than 70,000 people have been killed in the fighting. Courtesy: yahoo.com