

72 million US dollar Russian arms deal cancelled. (1994, October 21). *The Island*.

72 million US dollar Russian arms deal cancelled

by Shamindra Ferdinando

The People's Alliance (PA) Government has cancelled the controversial 72 million US dollar arms deal with a Russian firm for the purchase of about 200 armoured personnel carriers (APCs), two patrol boats, three AN 32 transport planes and other military goods. The Island learns.

Highly-placed military sources said that except for the 16 second hand BMP-2 APCs which were airlifted to Sri Lanka in August this year, the Government has no intention of going ahead with the arms

deal.

The previous UNP administration had entered into this particular agreement just days before it lost the August 16 Parliamentary polls. Mrs. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga suspended this deal when she assumed Premiership and promised a full-inquiry into this affair.

The previous administration had sent a very senior Defence Ministry official and scores of other military officers to Russia to inspect the APCs, planes and boats, informed sources said. The then government had paid 10%

of the total cost of these arms, these sources added.

Alliance sources said that those who were in key positions had made this questionable arms deal. The purchase of T-56 assault rifles, ammunition and second hand Chinese armoured personnel carriers in the past few years had resulted in controversy with some sections claiming that 'useless' arms, ammunition and other items including APCs were purchased without following proper tender procedures.

Informed sources said that a certain powerful

politician of the previous administration had supported the moves to order 72 million US dollars worth of Russian weaponry. "He was fully aware of this particular arms deal," one source said while claiming that the military men involved in the arms affair had claimed that they could seize Jaffna with the help of these new APCs, planes and boats.

Their plan was to airlift the BMP — 2 APCs, send them to Trincomalee for training purposes and then establish armoured units in the Peninsula, sources revealed.