

Ceasefire talks for day two

By William de Alwis from Jaffna

At the end of the first day's talks on Thursday the government delegation expressed high optimism about the final outcome.

Leader of the government delegation, Prime Minister's secretary K. Balapatabendi said at the conclusion of Thursday's talks that they dealt with economic factors and the priorities for making living conditions in the peninsula more agreeable than they are now.

Friday's talks will build on Thursday's discussions and work out the modalities for ceasefire and peace in the north and the east.

The government delegation which comprised Messrs Balapatabendi, Lionel Fernando, Rajan Asirvatham and Navin Gooneratne were received by Messrs Karikalan, deputy head of LTTE political wing, Ilamparithy, LTTE political chief of Jaffna district, Ravi, head of the Tamil Eelam Economic Development Organisation and Dominic, head of LTTE's Public Administration, at Jaffna University grounds, where the helicopter landed.

The government delegation drew enthusiastic cheers from over 2000 people who had thronged the university grounds. The LTTE police found it dif-

ficult to control the crowd and armed cadres were called in to assist. The university area was heavily guarded and armed cadres were seen keeping vigil from nearby roof tops.

The delegation was driven to the Subash Hotel in LTTE vehicles with commandos providing the back up. From there they were driven to the LTTE office in town, for talks.

A beaming Mr. Fernando met journalists after Thursday's first round and said: "From the beginning we felt that they (LTTE) were well with the government. Prabhakaran's first message manifested this and today we have good reason to believe that both parties are on the right path to peace".

Living conditions in Jaffna have deteriorated severely in the last 12 years of the Eelam war, which has claimed a total of nearly 30,000 lives since it first began in the 1970s.

Jaffna saw further reversals in 1990, with the cutting off of the power supply together with the abandonment of the train service and the closure of regular road traffic.

The trend took a turn for the better after the election of the government of Prime Minister Chandrika Kumaratunga. The new government opened the way to peace with the lifting of a long list of

restrictions on essential items to the peninsula.

Jaffna residents told the *Daily News* they were most optimistic of the prospects, from the current talks. Conditions have improved, but the life in the peninsula is still spartan, with soaring prices. Essential commodities ferried through the MPCs are available at Colombo prices. But petrol and electricity remain absent from the life of Jaffna today.