

Government frees 5 tigers, 13 more to be released. (1994, October 15). *Daily News*.



Mr. Balapatabendi, leader of the government delegation, being driven to the venue of the discussion in Jaffna, escorted by Tiger commandos.

Govt frees 5 Tigers, 13 more to be released

By T. Sabaratnam

Ceasefire discussed by delegations

The Sri Lanka government yesterday released five LTTE captives to demonstrate its goodwill and will release 13 more this morning.

The LTTE prisoners were released by the military in Palaly at the conclusion of the two-day official talks in Jaffna. They were handed over to the representatives of the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) and transported to the LTTE held area.

"We expect the LTTE to respond", said a beaming and confident Mr. Kusumsiri Balapatabendi, the leader of the 4-member delegation. He said a prisoner swap was not discussed during the talks.

The ceasefire issue was raised by the LTTE delegation leader Karikalan in his opening statement and followed up at the stage of detailed discussion. Mr. Balapatabendi said ways and modalities for a ceasefire were discussed and expressed the hope for an early truce.

"We discussed all possibilities of a ceasefire and a return to normalcy. We will submit all relevant details to the Prime Minister for the government to take a decision", Mr. Balapatabendi said.

The delegation drove from the airport directly to Temple Trees to report to the Prime Minister. Mr. Balapatabendi who carried the Prime Minister's greetings to LTTE chief Velupillai Prabhakaran took with him to Temple trees Mr. Prabhakaran's greetings to her.

Mr. Balapatabendi said Mr. Prabhakaran also indicated to the delegation through Karikalan, who

headed the LTTE team his interest in continuing the discussions.

"We will meet soon to continue the talks," said Information Secretary Lionel Fernando, a member of the delegation. The other members were Bank of Ceylon chairman Rajan Asirwatham and architect Navin Gooneratne.

Mr. Fernando said the delegations had decided to meet again but the date had not been fixed. "It may take place within ten days", he added.

The delegations concentrated their attention on issues connected to the reduction of hardships of the common people of Jaffna.

Reducing the cost of living, improving the infrastructure like roads and communication facilities, provision of electricity and the opening of a safe and easier route to the Jaffna peninsula, were discussed in detail.

"A route to Jaffna was the main problem. If goods move freely, the cost of living will come down", Mr. Fernando said.

He said three alternatives - Elephant Pass, Sangupiddy and sea routes were discussed. The details of these discussions would be placed before the prime minister to enable her to take a decision.

Reports from Jaffna indicate that the LTTE had pressed for the opening of the Sangupiddy road.

The delegations were filled at the enthusiastic

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Peace talks in progress: Thursday's picture of the two delegations shows the government team (on right) K. Balapatabendi, Secretary to the Prime Minister, Rajan Asirwatham, Chairman, Bank of Ceylon, Lionel Fernando, Information Ministry Secretary and Navin Gooneratne. Opposite, the LTTE team (from left): Ilamparithi, Karikalan, Dominic and Ravi. (Pictures by Sena Vidanagama AFP)



The emblem of the ICRC stands like a signpost along the road to Jaffna University where the government delegation were met by the LTTE. And at equally regular intervals, women on one side and men on the other, stand Tiger sentinels. (Picture by William de Alwis)