

500 barrels of petrol in Tigers' hands?

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Five-hundred barrels of petrol, released by the government in anticipation of a prisoner exchange deal with the LTTE, may now reach the hands of the Tigers in their Wanni jungle fastness, security officials warned yesterday.

The ship carrying other banned supplies also being sent North as part of the deal was, however, brought back to the navy held post of Kankasanturai with its cargo intact.

The stock of petrol that had been released

last week to a private fuel-distributor in Kilinochchi, deep in LTTE-held territory, was part of a package of restricted items which the government agreed to allow to be sent North in exchange for the release of 39 security personnel captured by the Tigers.

Security officials told 'The Island' that the stock of petrol had reached Kilinochchi before the military authorities could halt the transporting trucks on learning that the LTTE had reneged on the deal.

"The LTTE went

back on its word to release our men only after the petrol carrying lorries left Colombo", sources admitted yesterday.

Earlier, the security authorities moved quickly to prevent MV "Meris Ruhunu" owned by Mercantile Shipping from unloading the supplies it was carrying at the LTTE-controlled Pt. Pedro harbour, sources said.

Informed sources revealed that the Kilinochchi fuel dealer had transported the barrels of petrol well before the confusion erupted which resulted in the

LTTE further detaining of 32 policemen and one soldier in Jaffna.

The Jaffna GA, K. Manikkavasagar, accompanied by ICRC officials, was scheduled to visit Kilinochchi today to supervise the distribution of fuel. Security officials, however, fear that the LTTE may have already seized the fuel.

Sources described the consignment of petrol sent to Kilinochchi as only a part of the initial agreement between the LTTE and

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the government in the attempt to secure the release of captured policemen who have been in Jaffna for the past three years.

The Ship Ruhunu was carrying diesel, engine oil, brake oil, kerosene oil and fertilizer among other items to Jaffna. Officials said speculation about the LTTE removing the supplies was not true.

"Nothing had been taken, a senior Rehabilitation Ministry official said yesterday.