

Beginning a new peace process to end conflict. (1993, June 24). *The Island*.

Beginning a new peace process to end conflict

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Brigadier Ananda Weerasekara who successfully negotiated with the LTTE for the release of security forces personnel held by the terrorists said yesterday that LTTE spokesman Anton Balasingham told him that the exchange could be a beginning to the peace process.

He told 'The Island' that when the LTTE at the negotiations demanded that the 'economic embargo' on Jaffna peninsula should be lifted the Brigadier had replied that there had been no such embargo.

The Brigadier explained that President D. B. Wijetunga and the Security Council had agreed to the lifting of the restriction on the transport of bicycles, fuel and coconut oil, radio, school stationery, agricultural fertilizer, medicine and boxes of matches.

He added the quantum of these items needed in Jaffna would have to be decided by the Government Agent and not by the LTTE.

The Brigadier is to meet President Wijetunga before flying back to Jaffna to facilitate the transport of the other 33 security forces personnel still in Jaffna. He

said these men had now been freed and were not 'prisoners of war' any more. They were in good physical condition, he added.

Although the LTTE wanted free transport of batteries to be allowed to Jaffna the Brigadier refused to agree to the demand at the start itself. He explained that the JOC had no objection to the removal of the restriction on the seven items asked for by the LTTE.

There is no timeframe to bring back the 33 men who were still there but he said he hoped all of them could be transported here together.

"Nobody likes war," Anton Balasingham is reported to have told Brigadier Weerasekara.

The LTTE is in need of peace now, Mr. Weerasekara said adding that he was told that the LTTE wanted the government to give them prominence over other Tamil groups. But the LTTE had told him they would allow other parties to contest elections.

The Brigadier reiterated that every item that was transported to Jaffna had to pass through military and police checkpoints.

Although the LTTE earlier wanted a government emissary to be in Jaffna to hand over the captives later changed their position when Brigadier Weerasekara

met them. The LTTE had later said that they wanted a government emissary to talk about the release of the captives. They had claimed that their earlier position mentioned in the letter sent to Colombo through the ICRC had been a mistake due to 'interpretation problems.'

He said the LTTE did not want a removal of the military ban on transport through Kilali lagoon in the talks.

"I was nominated only to secure the release of our policemen and a soldier from terrorists," the Brigadier said explaining his mission.

The Brigadier also said that there was no sign of malnutrition in Jaffna.

Meanwhile at a conference of Petroleum Corporation officials and Secretary to the Ministry of Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Social Welfare presided over by JOC Chief General Hamilton Wanasinghe it was decided that 500 barrels of petrol, 500 barrels of diesel, 1500 barrels of kerosene 100 barrels of engine oil and 50 metric tonnes of urea should be sent to Kilinochchi by road immediately, Jaffna Government Agent K. Manickavasagar told 'The Island'.