

Committees to look into violations of agreement

By Suresh Mohamed

The government has proposed to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) the setting up of Committees to deal with any violations of the agreement of the cessation of hostilities which will come into force shortly. These Committees will consist of government, LTTE and foreign representatives and during the second round of peace negotiations held with the Tigers in Jaffna on Tuesday there was general agreement on this matter, Minister of Media, Tourism and Aviation

and Cabinet spokesman, Dharmasiri Senanayake announced at yesterday's Cabinet news conference at Visumpaya.

Quoting a communique from the Presidential Secretariat, the Minister said that details of implementation of the cessation of hostilities were discussed at length during the talks and most issues were resolved satisfactorily. The date on which the cessation of hostilities will commence and other details will be announced shortly. The communique indicated that the

government delegation which reached Jaffna on Tuesday for the second round of discussions was very cordially received by the LTTE. The talks centred around several major issues. The next round of peace talks is scheduled to resume on January 14 in Jaffna.

On the opening of access routes to and from Jaffna the government team suggested that two access routes be opened to and from Jaffna, i.e., Elephant Pass and Sangupiddy.

The opening of the Elephant Pass roadway was proposed with the

objective of facilitating the movement of heavy vehicular traffic required for the reconstruction of the Northern region, and for the economical and speedy transport of food supplies.

The government also believed that the opening of this road would enable the pilgrims from the North to participate in the ceremonies connected with the visit of His Holiness the Pope.

No agreement could be reached on this issue as the LTTE

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stipulated the conditions that the Army Camp at Pooneryn be completely withdrawn. The government could not agree to this at present, due to the prevailing military situation in the North.

On the question of fishing it was agreed to relax the ban on fishing in certain specified areas. Where rehabilitation and development of the north are concerned the government proposed a comprehensive package of rehabilitation and development of the Northern region at a total estimated cost of Rs. 40 Billion, over a period of years. This was accepted by the LTTE, with some amendments. Details regarding implementation will be discussed at the next round of talks.

It was also agreed to reconstruct the Jaffna Public Library and to appoint a commission to inquire into the burning of the Library.

On peace talks the PA government has constantly maintained that the cessation of hostilities is only a prelude to the commencement of negotiations towards the resolution of the ethnic conflict and ending the war. In this context, the government team advanced the view that the cessation of hostilities

and the commencement of rehabilitation, and development work should be carried out parallel with the commencement of peace talks.

Our team requested that dates be fixed for the talks.

The LTTE has yet not agreed to commence peace talks.

Details regarding this matter, including the relevant correspondence will be released shortly to the media.

The LTTE released four Police Officers as a gesture of "confidence, faith, trust and hope" in the President, as stated by the LTTE. The team had occasion to meet and talk freely with Commander Ajith Boyagoda and Leading Supplies Assistant Vijitha of the Sri Lanka Navy.

The LTTE was appreciative of the massive mandate given to the PA government and the President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, which they perceived as a rejection of communal and racial politics in Sri Lanka.

They felt that the President was given complete authority by the Sinhalese people to resolve the ethnic conflict.

They further stated that the Tamil people have also expressed their confidence of faith

in the President and are hopeful that she will successfully solve the problem.

The President and the government appreciates the warm cordiality shown to its delegation by the LTTE

and the gesture of goodwill in releasing 4 Police Officers, the communique added.

Q: Why was Mr. Lionel Fernando dropped from the government delegation which held the second round of talks?

Mr. Dharmasiri Senanayake: I personally feel he was not dropped. He was simply not asked to go! It was a five-member delegation and the government thought of including a senior Army and a Navy official as well. So the original delegation came down to three. I myself asked the President about this and she said Mr. Balapatabendi is a lawyer while the other two members are an architect and an accountant respectively. This is a good composition as the delegation discussed the question of a cessation of hostilities and a rehabilitation package. Mr. Lionel Fernando, my good friend, was not dropped; he was not asked to go, as I said earlier.

Q: But Mr. Fernando knows Jaffna well?

A: Quite so.

Q: Is the government

expecting 'specialised reports' from the accountant and the architect?

A: I am with you on that point. You can ask the President that when she meets journalists on Friday.

Q: Why were journalists not taken for the peace talks this time?

A: At short notice it was difficult.

Foreign Correspondents, Rupavahini gave us the films only at 2 p.m. on Wednesday and by that time the peace talks was stale news. We deal in news and not history lessons. Even the photographs were not made available to us in time. The Information Department has a list of names of all foreign correspondents. Surely we could have been contacted. There is a 'pool system' Rupavahini can't act like this...

Information Director Ariya Rubasinghe: I tried my best. Even the lab was kept open. Photographs were sent to all the local newspapers.

Ministry Secretary Lionel Fernando: There is some agreement which precludes Rupavahini from releasing the tapes.

Journalist: That's where exclusive coverages are concerned.

Mr. Fernando: Anyway I have already asked the DG to come to my Ministry tomorrow

morning with that agreement.

Minister Senanayake: I know about this only now. I will check on it.

Q: By Resuming talks with the Tigers has the government cleared the name of the LTTE in the Gamini Dissanayake assassination?

Mr. Senanayake: The inquiry is going on. That's a different matter. Peace talks are not connected to that.

Q: Did Cabinet discuss the outcome of the talks?

A: The President briefed the Cabinet on the talks. She said all the details will be given at Friday's news conference.