

## Air Force to get more 'lift' soon

by Shamindra  
Ferdinando

Sri Lanka last week called for fresh tenders for the purchase of three Antonov 32B transport aircraft and six more transport helicopters for the Air Force, security officials said. The People's Alliance government had called for international tenders to secure three Russian Antonov 32B transporters extensively used by the Indian Air Force and more than two dozen other nations and six numbers of M1-8, MTV-1, Mi-171 or Mi-17 helicopters.

The tenders were

called after the government cancelled a 72 million US dollar deal with a Russian firm to buy three Antonov transporters, helicopters, two patrol boats and upto 200 armoured personnel carriers (APCs).

The deal had been made in the last weeks of the previous regime.

The defence ministry in a notice published in the state owned Sunday Observer stated that bids should reach the defence secretary on or before 2 p.m. on December 8.

The Government is seeking to secure these

aircraft and helicopters as quickly as possible.

Antonov 32B can carry upto 50 combat troops and cargo while the Mi-17 helicopters can carry upto 30 troops.

The Air Force has already secured six Mi-17 helicopters.

Military officials believe that air transport capability must be bolstered in view of the serious Sea Tiger threat against Navy vessels engaged in ferrying men, material and food supplies to isolated bases in the north.

Thousands of troops based at Palaly,

Elephant Pass — Vettalaikerni sector, Mannar Island and all other small islands west of the Jaffna peninsula mainly depend on the Navy to keep them supplied. Military officials believe that although the Sea Tigers failed in destroying or damaging the Navy vessel Pabatha at Vettalaikerni early this month they are likely to make more attempts.

The Pabatha, one of few landing craft the Navy operates, is mainly used to transport men and material both to and from bases in the North-East.