

Government waits for Results of talks. (1994, October 14). *The Observer*.

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•Peace team due from Jaffna this afternoon

GOVT. WAITS FOR RESULTS OF TALKS

By Sukumar Rockwood and Panduka Senanayake

OFFICIALS IN Colombo hope that the Government negotiating team now in Jaffna would be able to pin the LTTE down to at least some basic issues before the team leaves Jaffna this afternoon.

The Government delegation, led by Secretary to the Prime Minister, K. Balapatabendi, which held an extended round of talks with the LTTE team led by Tiger political top-ranker Karikalan yesterday, has so far been able to discuss only the social and economic problems of the Jaffna population, according to latest reports reaching Colombo. "There has so far been no talks on peace and a ceasefire," officials in Colombo said.

Meanwhile, defence officials in Colombo categorically denied reports of an exchange of prisoners of war. A military spokesman said there had been no decision so far to release the LTTE prisoners held in Palaly.

"There is no truth whatsoever in the story," the spokesman in Colombo said, adding that they too had read and heard the story in the media but that it was without foundation.

"We must find out who is spreading this rumour," an indignant senior officer in Palaly said when contacted by phone.

An earlier story about the release of the Captain of the Naval gunboat 'Sagarawardena', Lt. Cmdr. Ajith Boyagoda and several policemen also appeared to be without foundation with both the Security Forces and the ICRC denying any intimation by the LTTE about handing them over.

An ICRC official, when contacted this morning said that they were not informed by the LTTE about the handing over of any prisoners. He said that the LTTE had allowed the ICRC to meet Captain Boyagoda but had not spoken anything about his release.

The Government delegation is due to leave Jaffna for Palaly base at 3.00 p.m. this afternoon.

The delegation, also including Information Ministry Secretary Lionel Fernando, Bank of Ceylon Chairman Rajan Asiriwathan and Architect Navin Gooneratne stayed the night at the Subash Hotel in Jaffna under very heavy LTTE security. Armed LTTE cadres are patrolling the area around the Subash Hotel as well as the area where the talks are being held.

The LTTE team comprises Karikalan, Ilampariti, Ravi and Dominic.

Top official sources say that the meetings between the Government delegation and the LTTE delegation were held in a very cordial and friendly atmosphere at the ICRC's political office just outside the ICRC Security Zone of the Jaffna Hospital.

"Talks were very cordial and I am very happy with what is happening", said

Mr. Lionel Fernando. The leader of the delegation Mr. Balapatabendi is reported to have been absorbing everything and saying less.

Earlier yesterday, before the helicopter landed at the Jaffna University grounds, the people who were gathered there to welcome the Colombo delegation, when they spotted the peace helicopter by its white markings on the under-side had broken through the LTTE cordon and rushed towards the helicopter. The LTTE had to move the people away and allow the passage of the vehicles of the ICRC and LTTE to carry the delegation to the hotel before going for talks.

A spokesman quipped: "This goes to show the yearning of peace by the people of Jaffna and they hope peace would be there soon. I hope the delegation does not miss the bus this time as the results of these talks will be very important to Sri Lanka's future".