

'Declare ceasefire, lift blockades'

LTTE want proof of PA intent

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Chief LTTE spokesman Anton Balasingham, while stating that their doors are open for negotiations, wants the government to make a goodwill gesture by declaring a ceasefire, lifting the economic embargo and opening a safe land route (Sangupiddy) to travellers to Jaffna.

This is stated in an interview with Anton Balasingham published in the Tamil language newspaper *Eelanathan* last Saturday.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Mrs. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, through the Deputy Minister of Defence Col. Anuruddha Ratwatte, has sought the views of top officials of the security forces on ending the northern war.

Col. Ratwatte will discuss peace moves and other connected issues with them today, official sources said.

Col. Ratwatte said the PA government intends giving priority to finding a political solution to the eleven-year war in the north. The prime minister will be informed of the views of the service leaders after these discussions.

The government has invited the LTTE for talks without pre-conditions.

Our Vavuniya correspondent reports that Balasingham's interview was the lead story in *Eelanadu* and *Uthayan*, the other-dailies published in Jaffna. The military do not permit these papers

to be brought to Vavuniya.

The Jaffna dailies said the economic embargo and closure of the Sangupiddy route has caused great hardship to the Jaffna people although all banned items are available in Jaffna - at higher prices.

Torch batteries, a strictly banned item, are sold freely. A pair of medium sized batteries fetches Rs. 125 and a pair of pen torch batteries Rs. 40.

The LTTE smuggles these banned items, earning huge profits, travellers said.

Travel restrictions have also resulted in the escalation of prices in the peninsula. Travellers report that a litre of kerosene sells at Rs. 35, a kilo of sugar at Rs. 40 and the current severe scarcity of coconut oil has sent the price of a bottle to Rs. 120-130.

Meanwhile, a Colombo datelined Reuter report said that the LTTE have offered to free captured Sri Lankan soldiers and policemen if the government lifts an economic embargo on rebel-held areas and releases rebel detainees, a separatist newspaper said.