

Tigers Free Other 34 Captives. (1993, June 23). *The Observer*.

Released servicemen and relatives housed in Subash Hotel, Jaffna

# TIGERS FREE OTHER 34 CAPTIVES

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LIBERATION TIGERS of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) yesterday released the remaining thirty-four servicemen, held captive by them for three years. But they will be allowed to leave Jaffna once the agreement is fulfilled, sources said. They are now at Subash Hotel, Jaffna.

Defence Secretary Air Chief Marshal Walter Fernando told *The Observer* this morning that the 34 men will return to Colombo, once the first consignment of banned items of fuel, medicines and bicycles reach the North, as agreed between the government and the LTTE.

On Tuesday the LTTE released five policemen and they were flown in a special plane from Palaly yesterday. They were accompanied by their relatives who went to the North with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Government's emissary, Brigadier Ananda Weerasekera.

These men - Wijekoon Mudiyansele, Wijekoon Banda, O.W.G. Dissanayake, Gamage Premadasa Abeywickreme, Sarath Sudu Nilame and Kumarasinghe Pathirannehelage Lal Gunasekera - were taken to the Police hospital, Narahenpita, for treatment as they were feeble and exhausted.

In a significant breakthrough the Government agreed to allow supplies of fuel, medicines and bicycles

to the North.

"We agreed to let them have certain things like medicines, fuels etc.," Defence Secretary said adding that "when our response is seen the Tigers will allow the 34 men to leave Subash Hotel, where they are now staying". The agreement was signed by the Jaffna Government Agent K.Manikkavasagar and Brig. Ananda Weerasekera on behalf of the Government and Anton Balasingham and another person on behalf of the LTTE, sources said.

Out of the 72 relatives who went to Jaffna only 28 returned yesterday with the five released men and others remained at Point Pedro, pending the release of the others.

The relatives had told the ICRC that they would not return without

their sons held prisoners by the LTTE.

To mark the completion of three years in Tiger detention, the 39 servicemen started a "fast unto death" on June 13.

The Tigers last Saturday agreed to free the captives unconditionally but suddenly changed their mind and demanded the lifting of an embargo on fuel, batteries, transistor radios etc. They made 14 demands from the Government.

Government representative Brig. Weerasekera who shuttled between Colombo and Palaly negotiated with the Tigers for three days to secure the release of the men taken hostage by the LTTE in June 1990, after they launched fresh attacks, when peace talks with the Government failed.



COMMISSIONER GENERAL of Rehabilitation Brigadier Ananda Weerasekera who flew into Jaffna last week as Government's representative to secure the release of 39 servicemen held captive by the Tigers is seen being escorted by two top LTTE men Karikalan and Ilampari'hi. This is a reproduction of a picture published in LTTE's newspaper *Eelanatham* on June 20.