

## Roundup: Norwegian peace envoy in Sri Lanka to revive stalled peace bid

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COLOMBO, Aug. 12 (Xinhua) -- Norwegian peace envoy Erik Solheim arrived on Tuesday in the island in new effort to revive the stalled peace process between the Sri Lankan government and the separatist Tamil Tiger rebels. Solheim, who arrived in Colombo in the early hours of Tuesday, is to visit the north town of Kilinochchi held by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebels on Wednesday, diplomatic sources in Colombo said. The Norwegian envoy is expected to have a series of meeting in the capital on Tuesday in connection with the stalled Norwegian- brokered peace process. His visit comes in the wake of a hardline stance adopted by the LTTE rebels with regard to one of their military camps constructed in June in an disputed area between them and the government troops. The army claims that the LTTE training camp at Manirasakulam in the eastern port district of Trincomalee is located in a government controlled area but the rebels said the vice versa.

The truce monitors, the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), have ruled that the rebel camp was in government-controlled area and their construction of the camp is a violation of the February 2002 ceasefire agreement. The SLMM said that they were referring the matter to the Norwegian peace facilitators as the LTTE had repeatedly defied their order to dismantle the camp. The continuous refusal by the rebel to remove the camp has prompted the truce monitors to review their role in the supervision of the ceasefire agreement between the two sides as they deem it a serious challenge to the peace process. Solheim is expected to discuss the issue with the rebels in addition to the government proposals which the rebels are currently studying on a interim power sharing arrangement for the war-battered north and east regions. Solheim was appointed by the Norwegians in the year 2000 to facilitate direct talks between the government and the rebels. His role was somewhat downgraded on the request of the then Sri Lankan government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga with the appointment of the Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister Vidar Helgesen to supervise the peace process.

However, Solheim remained in the Norwegian team facilitating six rounds of talks between the government of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and the LTTE rebels since last September. The LTTE rebels have also been accused last week by two leading international human rights groups, the Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, of taking advantage of the ceasefire agreement to kill their political opponents from Tamil parties, but the rebels denied the charges when the truce monitors raised the issues with them. The human rights groups blamed the truce monitors for not doing enough to investigate the killings but the truce monitors refuted the blames saying that they have no mandate to probe the killings which is the job of the police in the country. The LTTE rebels expressed their unhappiness with the government 's slow action to implement decisions reached at the previous six rounds of peace talks since last September and announced a temporary pullout in April. Later on, the rebels insist that an interim administration be established in the north and east with more powers granted to them for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the war-torn regions, a precondition to restart the peace talks.

The government handed over their proposals on a provincial administrative structure to the LTTE rebels through Norwegian facilitators last month as a basis for the resumption of the talks.

The rebels will meet in Paris later this month to study the government proposals with the participation of their legal and constitutional experts and submit to the government their counter proposals. Both sides have said that they are preparing for the recommencement of the talks which could start in early September. The talks are aimed at ending the country's two decades of bitter ethnic war since 1983 during which more than 64,000 lives were lost.