

Sri Lankan govt says peace bid with Tamil rebels moving forward

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COLOMBO, Aug. 14 (Xinhua) -- Sri Lanka's stalled peace bid between the government and the separatist Tamil Tigers rebels is set to move forward after weeks of stagnation, a government spokesman said on Thursday. "The process is moving forward and the resumption of direct talks at a date no later than the end of September is government's expectation," Constitutional Affairs Minister G.L. Peiris, the government spokesman and the top peace negotiator with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebels told reporters.

Peiris said that the French government had fixed a meeting of the LTTE's constitutional and legal experts between Aug. 21 to 27 in Paris. The rebels are to consider the government proposals for a provincial administrative structure submitted to them in July in response to their demand for an interim power sharing arrangement for the war-battered north and east regions with "politico-administrative powers". Peiris said that the rebels had asked the Norwegian peace facilitators a period of three weeks from the conclusion of the Paris meeting in order to send a response to the government proposals.

"The issues arising from the government proposals and the LTTE's response would have been clearly identified by then," Peiris added, expressing hope that direct talks between the two sides could then be resumed. After six rounds of direct negotiations since last September the talks between the two sides came to be stalled mid April when the LTTE announced a temporary pullout from the peace process aimed at ending the two decades of ethnic conflict that has claimed over 64,000 lives since 1983. Peiris said that it was important to maintain public confidence in the peace process and both sides must obey the rulings of the international ceasefire monitors. The truce monitor group, the Sri Lanka Monitoring Missions, has urged the LTTE to dismantle a camp constructed in a disputed location in the eastern port district of Trincomalee but the rebels have repeatedly refused to accept their ruling.