



Mon, Feb 26, 2007

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Last Updated: 23/02/2007 20:47

Unionists suspect IRA fugitives deal

High-level British government officials are involved in talks to try to get fugitive IRA men returned home without facing jail, it was claimed tonight.

New allegations of a side deal with Sinn Fein surfaced following confirmation that Attorney General Lord Goldsmith regularly discusses so-called 'On The Runs' with the Northern Ireland Director of Public Prosecutions and Secretary of State Peter Hain.

Even though Mr Hain has insisted no amnesty is being planned, a senior Ulster Unionist claimed it was an attempt to overcome one of the most contentious issues in the Northern Ireland peace process.

Policing Board member Fred Cobain predicted details would emerge after next month's elections to the Stormont Assembly in Belfast. "The Government has been trying to find some formula to satisfy Sinn Fein on the OTRs," he alleged.

"They are trying to find a way of allowing these people to come back without going through the courts. "We now know these discussions are regular and I believe they are going to keep on going until they circumvent the law."

Mr Cobain based his fears on a written Parliamentary answer given by Solicitor General Mike O'Brien. Asked by SDLP leader Mark Durkan whether he had discussed OTRs with Tony Blair,

the Director of Public Prosecutions or Mr Hain since planned legislation to deal with fugitives was withdrawn last January, Mr O'Brien confirmed no talks had been held with the Prime Minister.

But he added: "The Attorney-General has discussed the issue on a regular basis with the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland as part of the routine process of superintendence.

PA

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TODAY



7-11 °C

TOMORROW



3-10 °C

MONDAY



7-7 °C

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