

RAPID CONTEXT ASSESSMENT



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The government continued to enjoy its political ascendance following the defeat of the LTTE. The governing party has won all seven provincial council elections in the past few months and is expected to win the October Southern PC election as well. The Opposition parties are making an effort to form a grand alliance. The future of the executive presidency is again a topic of public discussion. The JVP says that it will support constitutional change only if the abolition of the presidency is a part of that change. Some other parties including minority parties are undecided.

August did not give much hope for improvement in the country's human rights situation. Media reports for the month showed that there were 24 killings and 26 arrests. The culture of impunity, absence of the rule of law and the arbitrary behaviour of the police continued during the month. The police campaign to eliminate alleged underworld criminals attracted support from senior officials in government. But the arbitrariness of such action came into sharp focus this month owing to two incidents that involved Sinhalese youth as victims. One incident involved a Sinhalese student who was physically assaulted by family members of a high ranking policeman with the connivance of police officials. The other was the killing of two Sinhalese youth allegedly by policemen in Angulana.

Both incidents caused public outrage. Many who in the past turned a blind eye to such incidents if not cheered them as being good for society were compelled to take notice of the underlying threat that such action posed to the rule of law and personal safety of all.

The IDPs in Vavuniya by and large remained in the camps. Their living conditions deteriorated with the onset of the rains. More disturbingly reports are coming in that people from the camp are being taken away in dreaded "white vans" and that no information is available on their whereabouts.

The incidents involving the Sinhalese youth who were victims of police provoked at least some sections of the non-state media to come out of its self-imposed censorship on matters pertaining to human rights and rule of law. In particular the importance of implementing the 17th amendment to the constitution returned to public discourse. But civil society failed to rise up to the occasion and show the vibrancy that is required for democracy to thrive in Sri Lanka.

One important positive development in an otherwise gloomy human rights and governance environment was the conduct of elections for the Jaffna MC and the Vavuniya UC. Although the voter turnout was relatively low, the elections were reasonably free and fair and the opposition parties did quite well in both.

The capture in Malaysia of the self-appointed new leader of LTTE Kumaran Padmanathan alias KP was a major victory for the Rajapakse administration. The government continued to strengthen its security apparatus on the grounds that the terrorist threat was far from

over and that no room should be left for its reappearance. The government declared that it would increase the defence budget, recruit more soldiers and establish permanent military camps in the north and east that were under LTTE control.

Macroeconomic numbers continued to improve in August. Inflation remained very moderate. The Central Bank continued to build its foreign reserves partly thanks to an infusion of \$875 million by a US investment bank that was tempted by Sri Lanka's high bond rate and the confidence that the imprimatur of the IMF created in investors.

Although macroeconomic numbers looked good the same could not be said of the news concerning public sector economic management. Parliament's COPE that oversees public enterprises issued a report that severely indicted the financial mismanagement of several of the institutions that it investigated.

Heavy inter-monsoonal rains caused floods in Ratnapura and Kalutara districts. In contrast, in the south-east residents and animals in major national wildlife parks suffered from draught.

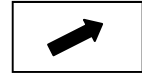
Public protest that erupted in Dompe in the Western Province and Kirinda in the Southeast over the establishment of two solid waste disposal and recycling facilities demonstrated that Sri Lanka is yet to find a viable solution to urban solid waste disposal that finds broad community acceptance.

INDICATOR REFERENCES

No change	→	Slightly improving	↗	Slightly deteriorating	↘
Significantly improving	↑	Significantly deteriorating	↓		

NATIONAL ANALYSIS - 27/7/2009 TO 26/08/2009

POLITICAL CONTEXT



The Executive Presidency which has become the main borne of contention has brought about various shades of opinion in respect of its abolition. The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) says that they will support Constitutional Reforms only if the abolition of the Executive Presidency is included in the document while Tamil and Muslim political parties are not sure what they want. They are divided (around a dozen Muslim and Tamil political parties) and not united with one voice..

Several promises were made by former President Chandrika Kumaratung and the incumbent President Mahinda Rajapakse to abolish it while they were in the Opposition but nothing has happened so far.

Sri Lanka Freedom Party (Mahajana Wing) Leader Mangala Samaraweera has found something useful to do and that is to strengthen the hand of the Opposition United National Party (UNP). This time he is trying to fuse a marriage between the UNP and the JVP. He did the same exercise when he was in the Government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga where he fused a marriage that later went sour between the People's Alliance (PA) and the JVP to form the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA).

The Presidential Election is scheduled to be held in December this year. The two contenders for the post are incumbent President Mahinda Rajapakse and Opposition

Leader Ranil Wickremesinghe. The last elections swung the Tamil minority 150,000 votes in favour of President Mahinda Rajapakse.

The United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) is on its home-run match. They have successfully won all the Provincial Councils (Seven held so far) except the north which is still to be held and the south to be held on October 10.

There is also a view to reduce the number of political parties contesting elections since it is not productive and a step towards that is to prohibit political parties from carrying out their activities under a particular religion.

GOVERNANCE



Ending the Practice of Impunity

The governance issue that sprang to the limelight during the past month was that of impunity. The problem of impunity has been a festering one in Sri Lanka. But it took a new and sharper dimension with the escalation of the war in 2006. There were hundreds of abductions, extrajudicial executions and disappearances reported that even prompted the government to appoint Presidential Commissions of Inquiry, one with international assistance.

However, no concrete improvements were to be observed. The government took the position that the war conditions in the country made it impossible to apprehend the culprits or even bring the terror to a halt. The vast majority of the victims in these

cases were Tamil, and it was claimed that they were either victims of the LTTE or were themselves affiliated in some way with the LTTE. This stilled public protest.

Ironically the end of the war in May 2009 did not bring the killings to a halt. This time around, the victims began to be alleged criminal gang leaders and their accomplices who began being killed in encounters with the police. As it was anti social elements that were being eliminated, public opinion once again was stilled.

However, the recent killings of two youth in the Colombo suburb of Angulana and the abduction and assault of a young student allegedly by police personnel have led to an outburst of public anger. As these victims

were Sinhalese, it was clear that no LTTE relationship could be foisted on them.

Their backgrounds also made it difficult to foist on them the charge of being criminals. The latest killings have brought up the issue of impunity and the need to restore the rule of law. The public anger against the killings have helped the media to emerge out of its cocoon of self censorship that held it in thrall. The failure of the police to ensure respect for the law and evidence of lawlessness within the police force itself has reinforced the demand by the opposition and civil society groups for the reinstatement of an independent police commission as mandated by the 17th Amendment to the constitution, which the government has failed to implement.

SECURITY



A significant month, marking the third anniversary of the Mavilaru victory, the third anniversary of the ACF killings and the 10th death anniversary of leading Tamil politician Dr Neelan Tiruchelvam. The arrest of self appointed leader and the Head of LTTE's Department of International Affairs Kumaran Padmanathan alias KP on August 6th in Malaysia was also a significant step forward in Sri Lanka's battle to eradicate any remaining vestiges of terrorism in the country. Following KP's arrest, Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapakse called on foreign countries to hand over LTTE members living abroad along with their assets, valued at over \$300 million.

Before KP's arrest, the LTTE's legal advisor Visuvanathan Rudrakumar in an interview with India's Tehelka website, reiterated the group's attempts to regroup and elect a 'Transnational Government' of Eelam.

Despite the conclusion of the war against the LTTE, the Defence Secretary said Sri Lanka's defence budget will not be reduced as there is a need to bring in new technology to upgrade the military capacity and also for the recruitment of new troops to be deployed in formerly LTTE - controlled areas. Chief of Defence Staff General Sarath Fonseka stated that security in the North will not be reduced and that plans are in the pipeline to set up permanent military

camps, replacing the temporary camps in formerly LTTE controlled areas.

Government troops continued with search operations in the newly liberated areas, recovering large numbers of weapons, ammunition and, explosives hidden by the LTTE.

The Sri Lanka Air Force has also announced plans to upgrade technology, acquire new planes, etc. to strengthen its capacity, while the Navy Chief said that the Navy is continuing with maritime surveillance and sea patrols in order to ensure the safety of the country's seas.

HUMAN RIGHTS



There had been no marked improvement in the human rights situation in Sri Lanka when compared with the previous month. In fact, one could say the issues of concern appear to have deteriorated. More and more voices are being heard with regards to the rights of the IDPs, rights of persons in custody both in the rehabilitation centres and the remand prisons, the dysfunctional state of the institutions provided by the Constitution for the protection of human rights, such as the National Human Rights Commission, the Police Commission, etc. Disregard to the provisions of the 17th Amendment to the Constitution continues to be a matter of concern. Consequently the work of the National Human Rights Commission and the Police Commissions have come to a standstill. The statement by the President following demonstrations by the people of Angulana consequent to the deaths of two persons arrested by the police that he would not tolerate such incidents is a welcome move. Let us now take a closer look at some of these and other issues.

Rights of IDPs

The heavy rain that fell in the Vavuniya District recently, almost a month before the start of the monsoons has opened the eyes of those in authority of the urgent need to have a proper drainage system around the camps to prevent flooding. The rains resulted in the camps being inundated with flood waters rendering them unfit for use. Photographs of the floods reaching almost the roof level of the tents and cess-pits overflowing explained the situation more clearly than could be described with

words. Perhaps due to this, the Minister of Re-settlement and Rehabilitation issued a statement a few days ago, that all the IDPs other than those from the Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu districts, would be re-settled within two weeks in their respective home towns. However, this announcement was followed by a statement that the addresses of the relevant IDPs would be verified with the records of the respective Government Agents before the re-settlement is effected. Since many of these IDPs had moved into the Wannu several years ago, it is likely that the records of the Government Agent may not have confirmation of the abodes of the IDPs who had left their residences several years ago before moving to Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu. This casts some doubts if they would be re-settled within the next two weeks as stated. Be that as it may, no amount of arguments about the need for landmines to be cleared or the need to pick out former LTTE cadres from amongst the IDPs can justify their continued incarceration within barbed wire fenced camps and denying them the right to move out of the camps if they chose to or meet their relations, visitors, well wishers and the media freely.

Law and Order

There had been more than 26 arrests and 24 killings reported in the press during the relevant period. This confirms the earlier statement regarding the law and order situation. However, there had been an increase in the number of persons allegedly taken into custody by the police as suspected underworld characters who had

later been killed while 'trying to escape or attack the police'. The circumstances under which several such killings had taken place leaves room for suspicions of the veracity of statements by the police in connection with such incidents. Among such killings were the deaths of two youth in the Angulana Police Division, which stand out as symbols of police brutality. The circumstances of these youth being killed resulted in the people of the area staging a demonstration which resulted in all the police officers from that police station being transferred and at least six of them being remanded on suspicions that they were responsible for the killings. A similar incident relating to a scuffle between the son of a Senior Superintendent of Police resulted in some police officers attacking the rival of this son of the SSP. This incident led to the SSP concerned being transferred from his position as the head of the Colombo Crimes Division and his wife being remanded with several other police officers.

Following this the IGP disclosed that investigations are being conducted into complaints against 170 other police officers for abuse of authority and that he had been directed by the President to take stern action against errant police officers. While these incidents highlighted the breakdown in the law and order situation in the country, they also indicated the depth to which indiscipline has spread amongst the law enforcement officers.

Data on Arrests, Abductions, Disappearances and Killings

During the period 21st July to 20th Aug 2009

(Sources - Daily Mirror, Island, Virakesari, Thinakkural, Sudar oli, Lankapage, Valampuri, Udhayan)

	Arrests	Abductions	Disappearances	Killings
Colombo	22	1		8
Kalutara	1			
Gampaha	2			2
Galle				1
Matara				1
Matale		1		
Ratnapura				1
Anuradhapura				2
Ampara		1		3
Trincomalee				2
Batticaloa		1		1
Mannar	1			
Jaffna			1	3
	26	4	1	24

During this month at least four abductions had been reported in the press and amongst them was the abduction of the Assistant Coordinating officer of the Minister of Disaster Management and Human Rights. This abduction had later been found to have been at the hands of the Mirihana Police who were found fault with by the Minister himself for violating procedures to be followed when such arrests are made. This incident helped to highlight the impunity with which persons are being abducted or arrested by the police totally disregarding to directives by the President that whenever such incidents take place, the next of kin must be informed and the suspect produced in Court within the stipulated time.

There were also reports of persons from amongst the IDPs being regularly taken away in white vans which the IDPs in the Wannu dread. It is reported the whereabouts of persons so taken away are not known and it is suspected that either the security forces personnel are taking away such persons from time to time for questioning or persons who had the means had bribed such persons to taken them away and release them to be allowed to leave the country.

There had been reports of two bodies being found in the Biyagama area, one in Grand Pass and two others of young girls in a canal in Colombo 7. These deaths do not appear to have been thoroughly investigated and no suspects had been arrested. There is a move by the parents of the two

girls who had come to Colombo from Maske-liya as servant girls, to get their bodies exhumed for a fresh postmortem as the parents suspect foul play and disbelieve the police version that they were suicides.

All these incidents, reported in the press do not augur well for the law and order situation in the country. Many other cases relating to abductions, disappearances and killings do not appear to get reported in the press, perhaps due to self-censorship. The press had reported only on disappearance during this month, inspite of statements by inmates of the IDP camps that they were abouts of several persons taken away in white vans from the camps, are not known.

Freedom of movement

The commencement of a bus service for persons from the Jaffna District to travel through the A9 route last month was thought to bring to an end of the restriction of the freedom of movement of the people in that district. But that later turned out to be a trial run and a regular transport service is yet to begin. The pass system is still in force and the people have to get clearance from the military to leave the peninsula and a regular bus service through the A9 route is yet to become a reality. It is however reported that lorries are allowed to take goods to the North using the A9 route provided they had obtained the necessary permit from the military. Hence it could be surmised that inspite of the war being declared to be over, the people of the North are still being denied freedom of movement to other parts of the country.

The ban on fishing imposed on the fisherman in the North during the war still continues despite promises to lift the ban after the elections.

Positive instances

Inspite of the gloomy picture, there had been some positive events relating to human rights during this month. It is commendable that the elections to the Jaffna Municipal Council and to the Vavuniya Town Council had been conducted relatively free of the kind of widespread violence that had been reported during elections of this nature in the previous occasions. Though the voter turnout had been a mere 20 % the very fact that the people of the respective areas had been provided an opportunity to exercise their right to vote at local body elections after a long lapse is a remarkable event during the month under review

The students amongst the IDPs from the Wannu and other places being provided facilities to sit the Fifth Grade Scholarship Examination and the G.C.E. Advanced Level Examinations is another positive step to be taken note of. Among the 1187 A/Level Students who were allowed sit the Examination were 170 who had been recruited as child soldiers. Another good news was that 110 child soldiers who had been taken to custody from the Wannu Camps and detained at a rehabilitation centre in Ampupussa had been allowed to meet their parents who visited the detention centre.

ECONOMIC CONTEXT



In so far as the economy was concerned, the macro financial health continued to be the main concern in August. Sri Lanka's inflation continued to remain low, a trend that began early this year. The year on year rate of consumer price inflation in August was only 0.9%. This gave the Central Bank further room to reduce interest rates to encourage bank lending and investment. The low interest rate will also help the Bank to meet some of the conditions that the IMF wants the Bank to adhere to in order to get future tranches of the IMF loan.

Although the rate of inflation has moderated in recent months the inflationary pressure that built up in the economy in 2008 is yet to fully dissipate. In August private bus owners demanded a hike in bus fares. The estate workers and electricity workers demanded a wage increase. Companies that sell consumer products such as cooking gas that are subject to price control also pressed for upward price adjustments.

The Central Bank boosted its foreign reserves by getting a US investment bank, Franklin Templeton Fund, to invest US \$875 million in government four year bonds and six year bonds. The recent IMF loan would have boosted the confidence of Templeton in Sri Lanka and the attractive interest rates that Sri Lanka offered would have been too tempting to ignore. The current US five year bond rate is below 3%. In contrast the Sri Lanka four year rate is close to 13% and the six year rate is a whopping 15%. For sure the Templeton investment boosted the foreign reserves of the country and further assisted to ease the foreign exchange crisis that the massive purchase of Treasury Bills that the Central Bank made in the last quarter of 2008 and the first quarter of 2009 created. However, the Templeton money, just like the IMF money, is not available to the Treasury for local spending or development work. But the Treasury will have to pay the interest in dollars that will come close to \$100 million per year until the bonds mature.

The Central Bank Governor is targeting a foreign reserve of \$5.0 to 6.0 billion by early 2011. This is significantly higher than the \$3.6 billion in reserves that Sri Lanka has promised the IMF when it obtained a Stand-by loan last July.

While the macroeconomic news was relatively good, the same cannot be said of public sector financial management at the micro level. The role of parliament as the body that maintains oversight over public institutions came up for debate between the government and the opposition. The membership of the Committee has gone up from 12 to 33 with 16 from the opposition. Traditionally the main function of the Committee on Public Enterprises (COPE) has been to scrutinize the accounts of about twenty public enterprises.

In a report that COPE issued in August, it criticized several public enterprises for giving credit without a proper needs assessment of the borrower or the capacity of the

borrower to repay such loans. It also found fault with these public enterprises for lack of adequate internal financial control. COPE also noted that some of these institutions failed to get proper legal advice from the Attorney General on issues that were of vital importance. COPE also noted that Sri Lankan Airlines and Sri Lanka Telecom which are two of the largest enterprises in Sri Lanka that were partly owned by taxpayers could not be summoned by COPE be-

cause both were registered as private companies.

The government announced that it may charge a visa fee from tourists. This seems reasonable. The government may also want to make use of this opportunity to do away with the two-tier fee structure that charges a higher fee from foreigners who visit historic sites and other places of interest and instead charge a flat cultural tax that can be consolidated with the visa tax. The current

dual fee structure causes much embarrassment and also leads to abuse and corrupt practices. Instead, everybody local or foreign can pay the same fee at the entrance to sites. The revenue from the consolidated visa cum cultural sites tax can be equitably distributed to maintain cultural and historic sites.

ENVIRONMENT



Mixed weather conditions continue to prevail across the country. The drought affecting large swaths of the island throughout July ended with heavy rain and subsequent flooding in some areas, but continued unabated in others. In mid-August gale force winds and rain affected parts of the northwest around Anuradhapura and resulted in extensive flooding in and around Menik Farm in Vavuniya. It is estimated that 100 000 plus people were affected in zones 2 and 4. The sanitation infrastructure was called into question as numerous toilet facilities gave way and raw sewage became mixed with flood waters leading to unhygienic conditions. Already typhoid fever is being reported from within the camps.

A few days later Ratnapura and Kalutara districts were badly affected by flooding with over 3000 families displaced. After a brief lull, the IDP camps in Vavuniya were again hit by inter-monsoonal rains, this time with over 2000 tents rendered unusable. With the northeast monsoon set to hit the coun-

try in October there is real concern about the status of the sewage systems and housing in these camps. Heavy rain in the central hills has resulted in several earthslips which have resulted in at least 2 deaths.

Meanwhile the southeast of the country is still experiencing drought conditions with water scarcities in communities from Tissamaharama to Badulla to Mahiyangana. Residents are experiencing serious inconveniences as water sources continue to dry up causing widespread water rationing. Crops continue to be badly affected. Animals have also been affected with tanks and waterholes drying up early and Department of Wildlife Conservation officials have thus been bringing water by bowser to fill tanks at Yala and Bundala National Parks.

A conflict erupted in Kirindiwala, Dompe in the middle of August over the proposed construction of a garbage treatment plant. Authorities claim that the plant, funded by

South Korea, is intended to vastly reduce the amount of garbage from the Dompe area; however residents are unhappy that a forest reserve is being cleared for construction and fear that accessing the valuable timber from the reserve is the real aim of the project. A similar protest was recently staged in Kirinda to protest against a garbage recycling project which residents claim has resulted in contaminated water and environmental degradation.

After a drop in dengue cases in July, it appears that the disease is gaining momentum again as inter-monsoonal rains provide ideal breeding places for mosquitoes. Already 240 people have died and over 24 000 been infected this year. Health officials are bracing for a sharp increase.

CIVIL SOCIETY & MEDIA SPACE



In the month of August the press had the rare privilege of expressing its moral indignation over two incidents of police excesses. In one a student was abducted and brutally assaulted while in the other incident two youths died while in police custody.

The spontaneous public anger that erupted over the two incidents with massive public demonstrations earned front page headlines, editorial condemnation and a sufficient number of op-ed pieces including several that resurrected the issue of the 17th amendment that was in deep hibernation.

The media that has remained content to be confined to the space that it has carved out for itself due mainly to its own restraints found in these two incidents an ideal mix of public indignation and concern with its own innate desire to perform the function it ought to perform at least in theory.

This observation is not an indictment of the media. On the contrary it explains the rela-

tionship between a vibrant civil society and a free media. The thousands who surrounded the Angulana Police Station represented the civil society provoked and proactive. Its collective voice resulted in the Media coverage that the authorities were quick to respond to, in a positive people friendly manner. In this country we have no freedom of information Act that enables us to access information. The governments ability to withhold information and the reactive response of the media to exercise self censorship creates a vicious cycle of suppression that neither party intended.

Who is to be blamed? It is the duty of civil society to create an atmosphere where credibility of information and the credibility of the source of information is verified. Rumour and Gossip even among the elite is common place in our society. It is further aggravated by our total infatuation with politics. It is more desirable if reason prevails over emotion. But the tragedy of Angu-

lana is that the emotions aroused was the catalyst that set in motion the process of reason.

It need not be so. An active civil society which could uphold a set of shared values is the dire need of our society today. It explains our predicament. Society in general is not only passive but is also inactive. Civil Society consists of the same general public but has the means of articulating its desires and interests. Should it always occur as result of some disaster man made or natural?

HUMANITARIAN & DEVELOPMENT SPACE



Floods in Menik Farm

The heavy rains and strong winds that descended on Vavuniya starting on August 14th, flooded welfare camps in Menik Farm and caused great damage. Zones 3 & 4 are reported to have been the most severely affected. Out of a total population of 36,785 in Zone 4, 17,539 were left without shelter as tents in 16 out of 37 blocks were either damaged or destroyed.

Added to this, latrines overflowed causing unbearable stench, and with water bowsers getting stuck in the mud, water supply was suspended. Food provision too got disrupted. With the rising threat of spread of diseases, the Government and UN were under scrutiny on the standards of toilets each had built. The government built latrines had fared better, as they were designed to be longer lasting than the latrines built by the UN, which were only meant to last for six months. UN and other agencies are reported to have been reluctant to build longer lasting latrines for the fear of IDPs being kept in camps permanently. The Gov-

ernment on the other hand states that they knew that the IDPs would be in camps for more than 6 months, and hence planned for structures that would last a longer period.

The fact remains that if a few hours of rain could cause so much damage, what the plight of the IDPs would be when the continuous rains associated with the monsoon, which is just around the corner, strikes. It is our hope that all concerned would take this incident as a wake up call and plan for this eventuality.

Another disturbing development is the lukewarm publicity given to the plight of the IDPs by the national media. Despite the heavy damage caused to thousands of the internally displaced in the North, few in the South of the country seemed to be aware of this incident.

Resettlement

A number of IDPs in Welfare Camps in the Vanni have been resettled in Jaffna and Trincomalee. To speed up the resettlement

process, the Ministry of Nation Building called for joint surveys into mine clearance by the Sri Lanka Army and the demining agencies. Several such surveys are taking place and pressure is being applied from the government to expedite action in order to make possible the resettlement of the displaced people in keeping with the government's 180 day programme. Senior government authorities have also stated that facilities such as education, health and agriculture services will be established before the resettlement takes place. Accordingly Divisional Secretaries of the respective areas have been given instructions to identify such needs in their areas.

DISTRICT ANALYSIS

(PERIOD OF REVIEW- 27TH JULY 2009 TO 26TH AUGUST 2009)

AMPARA

STRUCTURES

Security incidents mar the peace in Ampara, as the abduction of civilians, smuggling, rape and murder continue. The people seem reluctant to lodge complaints with the authorities however, as it is generally accepted that these incidents are carried out by gangs with political backing. The Government's unsuccessful attempts to disarm armed groups have also resulted in disillusion among the people.

Some clashes took place between the LTTE and the STF and continue to remind the people that it is vital to be alert for any signs of rebels who are still in hiding.

After the war ended, other issues have now become of vital importance and need to be resolved speedily. Among these are the resettlement of IDPs, political stability, the equitable allocation of development resources, and the development of the district by attracting new investment.

Meanwhile, infrastructure development such as building roads, providing water supply and irrigation and post and tele-

communication services are continuing.

ACTORS

The Government, district politicians and the Security Forces are the main actors.

DYNAMICS

Intermittent clashes between the LTTE and the Security Forces lend to tensions in the district and the people are still alert for signs of danger. Peace building is now at the forefront of the district's needs and the Government and NGOs are attempting to address that need together with the co-operation of the people.

STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS

The relevant authorities need to concentrate on peace building initiatives, and also make people aware of their rights and duties, as democracy in the district is still a new concept for people who have lived nearly three decades under the semi rule of the LTTE.

Development needs to progress steadily in order to attract new investments to the area.

BATTICALOA

STRUCTURES

Paramilitary activity in on the rise, as abductions and other similar incidents continue unchecked. Government attempts to disarm these groups failed, and it is widely accepted that this is due to the political backing many of these groups enjoy.

Among the many pressing issues in the district are the resettlement of IDPs, political and security stability, the need for large scale investment input and the equitable allocation of development resources.

It is also of note that while security conditions have improved in the town areas after the war, the interior villages have seen no improvement and many of these villages are at threat from paramilitary activity, without the benefit of an armed security presence to defend them to some degree.

ACTORS

District politicians, NGOs and paramilitary groups were the main actors during the reporting period.

DYNAMICS

The people seem unwilling to come forth and discuss their grievances, and this seems to be due to the political instability in the area, as powerful political parties run the show and people seem unhelpful of democratic redress to their issues and grievances.

Meanwhile, the removal of the travel pass system has boosted the morale of the people as they are much freer to travel both within and outside the district.

STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS

Stern action needs to be taken against paramilitary groups and those supporting them as they are a threat to the district's

security and development. One step towards this is the disarming of all armed groups.

The police and security forces need to be given Government support to take stern action against perpetrators regardless of any political backing they may have. Security to the more remote villages is also a necessity and needs to be provided without further delay, as these people are very vulnerable such attacks.

COLOMBO

STRUCTURES

Recent reports of police brutality and high handedness have dominated the spotlight in Colombo, with an angry public outcry at the unchecked behaviour of these officers of the law, prompting intervention and statements by the President and high level police officials. In one incident, a student of an IT campus in Malabe was abducted and assaulted allegedly by the Colombo Crime Division police on instructions of the CCD Chief's son. In another, two youths taken into custody reportedly on a complaint of harassment were allegedly tortured and then shot dead by police officers.

The Government's declared war on the underworld has kicked into high gear. Several high profile underworld figures have been found shot dead in and around Colombo, allegedly by rival gangs.

Continuing search operations have led to the recovery of a substantial amount of ammunition with several people being taken into custody on suspicion of links with the LTTE, including a senior police officer of the Gampaha police.

The dengue epidemic continues to worsen, with casualty figures for the first

eight months of the year being the highest in Sri Lanka's history, with Colombo being one of the worst affected districts.

ACTORS

The Police as well as other security forces, the Government and Health authorities are the key actors during the period under consideration.

DYNAMICS

Relations between the public and the police have severely deteriorated due to the increased number of deaths of those in police custody as well as assaults on and unwarranted arrests of civilians.

Meanwhile, Health authorities continue to battle the rapid spread of dengue and the increasing number of fatalities due to the disease.

STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS

The Government needs to take strict action to ensure that there is no political or other high level interference in the police and security forces, as well as a firm hand with those in the forces who act with impunity to further their personal causes. Public perception is that the police is acting with increasing impunity due to the protection it is offered by high ranking

Government officials, and the public outcry against such machinations is mounting. Government should take proper actions not to make any influences for legal

The crackdown on the underworld has met with public approval to the most part, but again the relevant authorities need to ensure that suspects are arrested and given due process, instead of being killed in shootouts, etc.

Dengue awareness campaigns need to continue in order to reduce the number of fatalities in the country.

JAFFNA

STRUCTURES

The district remains on alert for any remaining vestiges of terrorism. Four active LTTE cadres, allegedly directly responsible for some murders and security incidents in the district, were arrested by the STF during the reporting month. The air of tension prevalent during the final months of the war, is however easing and the people are gradually reverting to their daily routines.

The UPFA swept the boards at the Municipal Council election Jaffna with 13 seats while the TNA secured 8 and the role of the main opposition party in the council. It is however noteworthy that according to reports only 18% of the population voted at this election, the first of its kind in the district in 11 years.

The Government is planning to extend its Uthuru Wasanthaya programme now active in the East, to the North, by developing basic infrastructure such as roads, in an attempt to attract investment to the province.

Meanwhile, nearly 2000 families are still languishing in welfare camps in Jaffna, awaiting resettlement.

ACTORS

The Government, the LTTE, Security Forces and politicians were the main actors during this period.

DYNAMICS

The Government is on a drive to empower people to embark on income generating projects. Technical and financial assistance to this end by the Government as well as development related NGOs are bound to go a long way to this end.

While the A9 road has enabled trade between the North and the South, many Jaffna traders are unhappy about restrictions in transportation on the A9 road, as it leads to delays and loss of goods such as fish and fresh vegetables. They also complain that they are unable to break into the markets effectively as some traders operate monopolies at the Dambulla Economic Centre.

The people are hopeful that they will be able to enjoy train services as the Government has begun constructing train stations and other facilities which are slated to be completed by the end of 2010.

STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS

Following the election of the Municipal Council, the Government must now concentrate on educating the people of their rights and duties, in order to establish a tradition of good governance and strong relations between the authorities and the people.

Income generation has to now be given priority and support systems such as vocational training have to be set into place in order to enable the population to secure employment with new companies that are bound to begin investing in the North.

The authorities should also look into the concerns of traders who transport their goods along the A9 road and try to solve the situation in order to encourage trade between the two provinces.

MANNAR

STRUCTURES

Famous Madhu festival went off without a hitch despite an over 200,000 strong crowd descending on the district for the services, with over 4,000 security forces deployed to man the event.

The supply of available drinking water in the Madhu area is inadequate, but the discovery of a new water spring around 10 kilometres away from the Madhu Church could considerably increase the supply, if the water is found to be suitable for drinking.

The number of fishermen returning to their trade following the relaxation of the ban of fishing continues to increase. At the same time, the number of Indian fishermen encroaching on Sri Lankan water has also increased, and clashes between the Sri Lankan Navy and these fishermen have increased.

Life in Mannar continues to improve as resettlement continues at Musali.

ACTORS

The Madhu pilgrims, security forces and

NGOs are the main actors during the reporting period.

DYNAMICS

The successful conclusion of the Madhu feast was a morale boost to the Catholic population in the district as well as the rest of the island.

While restrictions on fishing have been lifted, many fishermen are unable to do so as they have not been provided with any facilities to purchase necessary equipment. The fishermen are therefore discontented and frustrated at this turn of events. In addition, the encroaching on Sri Lankan water by Indian fishermen and subsequent clashes between the Sri Lanka Navy and these fishermen have rendered the seas unstable and act as a deterrent to fishermen.

STRATEGIES & OPTIONS

The Government needs to expedite resettlement before the onset of the Maha rains so that farmers could attempt to cultivate their lands and generate some income.

Restrictions on public transport to the South, if relaxed, would enable passengers to travel straight to the South, eliminating the necessity to take several connecting buses, which is a hardship, especially during the rainy season.

The authorities also need to take action to enable university students languishing in the IDP camps to pursue their studies, which have already been delayed by several months.

TRINCOMALEE

STRUCTURES

With the ending of the war, many students in the Eastern province are eager to resume their studies. The Eastern Province Ministry of Education has attempted to solve the issue of teacher shortages by recalling retired teachers in subjects such as Science and Mathematics.

IDP resettlement is continuing. The details of more families selected for resettlement have been sent to the police for investigation, and once completed the families will be able to resettle in their original homes.

An increasing number of local as well as foreign investors are currently exploring investment opportunities in Trincomalee. Investors related to shipping in particular are showing enthusiasm, given Trincomalee's world famous natural harbour, said to be the best in the world.

Companies such as banks, ICT companies and fast-food outlets have already set up in Trincomalee, which augurs well for the district's future development.

The Minister for Foreign Employment Promotion Keheliya Rambukwella and the

Minister for Nation Building recently visited the district, with the aim of registering those seeking foreign employment under an island-wide scheme.

Meanwhile, A/L examination centers were established in all zonal levels and schools and several students from Trincomalee, including those living in IDP camps were preparing to sit for the examination.

ACTORS

Education authorities, local and foreign investors and the IDPs can be considered the main actors in the period under consideration.

DYNAMICS

The increasing number of tourists to the districts has given rise to immediate employment opportunities and increased income generation capacity as hotels sought to expand their staff to cope with the increasing demand. However, it is now necessary to upgrade hotel and infrastructure facilities such as roads and electricity supply, as the existing facilities are inadequate to cope with an influx of foreign visitors who will have certain basic requirements.

As IDP resettlement continues, the Security Forces continue to be alert for LTTE cadres who may attempt to slip out in the guise of IDPs.

STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS

Vocational training centers need to be set up in order to train the youth in the area and render them employable in rapidly growing sectors such as tourism, construction and IT, while the development of language skills also needs to be paid attention to. This is necessary in order to enable the youth of the area to effectively compete with applicants from other parts of the country who may have had better access to these facilities through the years.

As always, the development of income generation facilities for resettled IDPs continues to be a priority

VAVUNIYA

STRUCTURES

The district remains generally calm, with a lower incidence of crime being reported.

The situation regarding the IDPs however is reportedly deteriorating, especially in view of the current rainy season. There are currently over 250,000 IDPs, comprising around 84,000 families, living in 20 camps in Vavuniya. Early this month a small number of families were released from the IDP camps in the district. Vavuniya's GA announced that 16 villages have been cleared of land mines, and after the construction of roads and provision of electricity and water supply to these villages, more IDPs will be resettled.

Recent floods have made the conditions in the camps dismal, with more than 1,000 families having to be relocated due to the flooding of their camps. The campsites are soggy and people find it very difficult to even walk around while vehicles also get stuck in the mud. Gully suckers and bowsers carrying drinking water are unable to reach the camps. Most of the kitchens have gone under water and there is no dry firewood avail-

able, necessitating the provision of cooked meals to the IDPs, while plywood toilets erected by UN agencies have given way due to the heavy rains, reducing the number of already inadequate toilets. Toilet pits have also overflows and the camps are floating in a mess of human waste and garbage.

Ammenesty International has made a fresh appeal to the Government for the release of tens of thousand of war displaced Tamils from the Vanni, while USAID has promised Rs 1.7 billion to the WFP for six months of food supplies to IDPs who are resettled early. Mobile documentation clinics are in the process of providing identity documentation to IDPs in order to further facilitate speedy resettlement.

Meanwhile, out of the 1,887 IDP students who sat for the A/L examinations, 166 students were reportedly ex child soldiers.

The spread of disease due to unsanitary conditions in the camps has led to 34 deaths from illnesses such as meningitis and encephalitis during a three month

period. There are also a large number of pregnant mothers who have been diagnosed as anemic and requiring care.

The Madhu area was a hive of activity with over 200,000 pilgrims from all parts of the country converging for the famous Madhu festival.

ACTORS

Government authorities, the Health sector, NGOs and IDPs are the main actors.

DYNAMICS

The Tamil community in the district is encouraged by the State's resettlement of a few thousand IDPs. Conditions in the camps are a source of grave concern and will have to be attended with the greatest urgency. The camps are virtually uninhabitable and unsanitary conditions are leading to the spread of fatal diseases.

The mobile documentation clinics are catering to a great demand for the replacement of identity documents such as birth and marriage certificates, and have met with vast approval by the people.

STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS

The Government and NGOs engaged in the provision of health care need to aggressively address the spread of diseases such as meningitis and encephalitis in order to prevent deaths. Vaccinations clinics need to be conducted and proper equipment and facilities need to be provided to district hospitals in order to enable speedy diagnosis and efficient treatment of the diseases.

Resettlement processes also need to be speeded up as in three months only 4% of IDPs have been reportedly resettled.

The Government could look into the options of temporarily resettling IDPs with their relatives living in cleared areas as well as expedite procedures to enable religious institutions to take over the care of orphans, the elderly and the disabled, in order to ease congestion within the IDP

camps. This could also lead to the improved provision of living shelters, food and health care to the existing IDPs within the camps.

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The Rapid Context Assessment (RCA) aims to provide useful information for humanitarian and development agencies to plan and implement more effective interventions addressing various humanitarian and development needs based on a profound understanding of local dynamics.

At the same time, the RCA aims to enhance prospects that interventions are sensitive to the peace and conflict dynamics in the districts and that agencies at a minimum avoid creating or exacerbating conflict (Do No Harm) at a maximum contribute to conflict mitigation/transformation and peace building (Do Some Good).

Risk assessments aim to enhance agencies' efforts to stay operational while increasing safety of staff and people in implementing areas.

At an external level (general public, international community) RCA will serve advocacy purposes in providing comprehensive and balanced information about the situation in Sri Lankan districts.

We welcome your comments and suggestions on the contents of this report. Please mail us at feedback@cha.lk

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