

RAPID CONTEXT ASSESSMENT



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



In February no significant change in the political situation of the country occurred. The government is in almost total command of the political situation in the country. Its electoral dominance is unchallenged. The government party appears to be aiming for a two-thirds majority in the next parliamentary election that will give it the power to amend the constitution without support from other political parties in parliament. The main opposition UNP is bitterly divided on the party leadership issue. Some want the current leader Ranil Wickremasinghe to be replaced but many party stalwarts fear that it would weaken the party further. The LTTE is all but certain to be defeated in the battlefield but a viable political solution is needed to convince the donors that the country deserves large scale post-conflict assistance.

The provincial council elections also illustrated the weakness of devolution and governance in the country. The campaigns were not about provincial issues but about the war. The chief minister of the Eastern Province is complaining that his capacity to govern is constrained by the dearth of resources at his command. Human

rights violations in the form of killings, disappearances, abductions and arrests continued but the numbers were more moderate than in the preceding several months. Without improved governance it will not be possible to have lasting peace. Civil society action on these issues during the month was minimal. The political opposition was also too weak to take up these issues in an effective manner. However hearings in the US Senate elicited critical comments on the conduct of both the government as well as the LTTE in regard to human rights. An envoy of the UN visited the country to evaluate the IDP situation.

LTTE lost key military and naval facilities in the fighting during February. In the context of its shrinking territory, arms supplies and human resources the LTTE resorted to desperate measures such as suicide air attacks on Colombo, suicide bombings at IDP checkpoints that killed soldiers and civilians alike and murder of border villagers. The government's military campaign is also causing significant civilian casualties. The government claimed that the LTTE was using civilians as a human shield but the LTTE denied it.

The economy produced mixed results last month. Tea and rubber prices weakened and tourist

arrivals were down. The foreign currency reserves of the country declined making it increasingly likely that the government would have to ask for an IMF loan. The government proposed a bailout plan worth Rs 4.5 billion for finance companies and leasing companies that have been shaken by the Golden Key Credit Card Company collapse.

The good economic news in February was the further reduction of inflation attributable to falling commodity prices and tight monetary policy. The Central Bank took steps to reduce interest rates to make bank credit cheaper. The likely end of the war has made the business community more confident of the future outlook. But the share market lost about 7% of its value during the month.

In environment the Disaster Management Centre (DMC) of Sri Lanka and Dialog Telecom PLC jointly launched a nationwide Disaster and Emergency Warning Network (DEWN) using the Dialog mobile phone network. The Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Sri Lanka (FCCISL) initiated a program to improve environmental practices in five major industries in the country. The camps that are being setup in the north for the war IDPs have created a number of environmental concerns including water, sewerage and sanitation as well clearing of forest land.

INDICATOR REFERENCES

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

NATIONAL ANALYSIS - 28/1/2009 - 26/2/2009

POLITICAL CONTEXT

The UPFA Government is holding back elections to the remaining two - Southern and Uva Provincial Councils - until elections to the Western Provincial Council is concluded. The UNP has still not been able to secure a single province let alone sufficient number of seats to create a stir for the ruling UPFA in a province.

Although some UNP party members are working hard to tip the balance so that its Leader Ranil Wickremesinghe could be replaced by someone who would attract more votes, party stalwarts seem to think that it would damage the party to the extent of it going in two different directions and this would be far worse than losing Provincial Council elections.

The SLFP and all its constituent members who helped form the UPFA and contest the last parliamentary election and those who

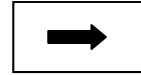
are still to join are being coaxed to help form a single party which will eventually contest under one name and symbol. However, this makes it difficult for those who are vying for preferential votes to secure a seat in parliament since there will be much infighting within a district among the candidates to secure the most amount of preferential votes. This happens because candidates contesting under different political parties will contest under one party symbol.

The UPFA plans on trying to swipe the board so that it can hold a larger majority in parliament required to amend the Constitution. They would require at least 150 seats (2/3rd) of a total 225 seats to effect major changes in the Constitution. This is a Constitutional requirement.

Meanwhile while the political game is played elsewhere other than the north and

the east, the Security Forces are almost closing in on the last stronghold of the LTTE. This situation has certainly boosted the popularity of the ruling government. The current elections are being fought on a popularity vote and do not mean that they (the government) is capable of handling an ever-dwindling economic slide.

The co-chairs to the peace process (Norway, Japan, America and the EU) that had pledged billions of dollars for the development of the north and the east if there were a permanent peace in place are still very keen to see a durable political solution in place.



GOVERNANCE

Political Agenda of Centre Negates Devolution of Power

The premature dissolution of Provincial Councils at the whims and fancies of the government and the timing of provincial elections to fit in with political schedules of the ruling coalition vitiates all principles of good governance. The Provincial Council system was established to provide the basis of a solution to the ethnic conflict based on the devolution of power. This has been reiterated by the present government which had pledged to fully implement the system to include the Northern and Eastern provinces. But there is a serious gap between words and deed.

At the provincial council elections to the Central and North Western Provincial Councils held on February 14, the main campaign issue was the war. The governments military victories in its battles with the LTTE took centre stage in the election campaign of the ruling party. It is regrettable that the

main issues canvassed at the elections revolved around national issues, such as the issue of war in the north, rather than on the provincial issues of devolved power and local matters for which purpose the Provincial Councils were established. This was also echoed in the media, especially that controlled by the state. Due to the preponderant focus on this issue, opposition candidates too were compelled to respond to this issue.

The focus on the war at the recent provincial council elections, coupled with the humanitarian crisis in the north at the present time, point to a disturbing feature. There is an absence or serious weakness in the culture of local governance and human rights. The elected Chief Minister of the Eastern Province has complained on numerous occasion, that his power to engage in local governance is crippled due to lack of economic resources and decision making power. The problem is that there is hardly any public voice from local communities being articulated against the weak-

ness of local governance and the human rights violations taking place in the country due to the war. Less than 5 percent of the national budget is devoted to provincial council.

Eliminating the LTTE and the ideology of separation by war alone is unlikely to be possible when it is coupled with violations of human rights of the displaced and civilian population which generates extreme resentment against the government. The ability of the LTTE to be a deadly and tenacious foe even in the face of defeat was demonstrated by its unexpected air attack on Colombo. Virtually simultaneously suspected LTTE cadres in the east attacked a Sinhalese village and killed more than 20 people, including children. The present military-centred mindset cannot be expected to bring peace now or in the future. The government and larger society need to recognize the political roots of terrorism and address that problem of good governance, local autonomy and human rights without equivocation.



SECURITY

Battles continued even during this period though the deadline has passed only to witness a large number of innocent civilians sandwiched in-between. Tamil National Alliance Parliamentarian Group R. Sampanthan told media that between Mid December 2008 to till February 2009 over 2000 people killed and more than 4500 injured and over thirty five thousand displaced. The final battle has inflicted heavy damages to

both the Government troops as well as to LTTE in the three decade of the civil war. Which has resulted in more territory and assets been captured by the Government forces despite the heavy confrontation from the LTTE. According to the latest reports as at February 25th LTTE is confined to an area of 58 square kilometres. it is not only the LTTE held areas that shrinks but also the security columns as well. The latest been capturing of Puthukkudiyiruppu

west by 58 division of the Sri Lanka Army, following the fall of Ampalavanpokkanai. - It is considered as a strategic LTTE military location in Puthukkudiyiruppu North. Among recovered by the Security Forces are a factory run by the LTTE that had manufactured bombs including "Arul" bombs, underwater craft similar to a submarine along with three other smaller underwater crafts from Udayakattukulam area in the Mullaitivu district, LTTE air craft



manufacturing plant and Radha Regiment Headquarter which provided personal security to the leaders, seized LTTE torture chamber and open prison which spread over 5 areas of land to the west of Vishvamadu. Troops reached Vishvamadu junction during the later part of January and it is a key stronghold of the LTTE. Govt. troops seized a largest LTTE suicide bomber and advance combat training facility. The advancing troops towards north of Puthukkudiyiruppu had to face six earth bunds and the mined terrain including an LTTE suicide bomber who blew himself up injuring eight soldiers.

Unconfirmed reports states that LTTE are using severally injured civilians as suicide bombers. A 13 year -old blew herself who had arrived with the displaced people at Sugandarapuram in Vishvamadu killing 30 people including 20 soldier and 10 civilians injuring 64. There are unconfirmed reports stating that the LTTE is using chemical weapons only to justifying when members of the security forces died with any external injuries. Soon after the celebration of Independence the government forces captured the LTTE's last sea base "Chalai" virtually cut-off from the sea and confining to land areas. Chalai is strategically important as it unpopulated and the area adjoining the beach and a patch of jungle and the lagoon. It was from this location that the LTTE carried out several devastating attacks on Sri Lanka Navy.

At present the LTTE dominated area is being attacked by 5 different divisions from 5 different locations carried out by 53 division, 55 division, 58 division and Task Force 2 and 4. With the shrinking of LTTE controlled area the SLA decided to construct a second defence line in order to provide additional security to the troops reserved. We can anticipate that it will the 53rd and the 58th division will be involved in the final battle of the Eelam war IV ending three decades of Civil war.

Though the Govt. troops have been able to capture seven air strips belonging to LTTE, however the security forces had not been able to locate air crafts. Tiger guerrillas carried out its first air suicide attack during this period killing 2 persons and injuring 50. The suicide mission was carried out by two air crafts targeting VVIPs and economic establishments which was shot down by the security forces. This was the 9th air attack by the LTTE with the first been on March 26.2007 in Katunayake. A group of suspected LTTE cadres killed 21 villages Karametiya village in Inginiyagala in the Ampara district.

Despite the heavy civilian casualties, the Govt. vowed to continue its military operations to annihilate terrorism from SL. Due to amounting pressures from various stakeholders the President declared a 48 hour period of "safe passage" on January 29th and then later was extend for another 48 hours anticipating a positive response

from the LTTE. Both the Government and the LTTE blame each for target the civilians in the safe zone although there are many request form various stakeholders to respect the "safe zone" reiterating that an elected government must take all possible steps to protect civilians from injury and loss of life under international law and the LTTE has an obligation under international law to permit civilians under their control to flee areas away from the fighting. According to military reports the LTTE is preventing more than 250,000 civilians leaving the area and using them as human shields. While the LTTE responded saying that they have not prevented anyone from leaving the area.

As at February 12 the Military says that only 700 LTTE cadres left out of which 250 surrendered and some have fled the organization. LTTE cadres is shrinking but not the government forces. It is been expanded with Govt.'s propaganda but many missing among the casualties. Whether it is a member of the paramilitary or government forces all are citizens of this Island nation

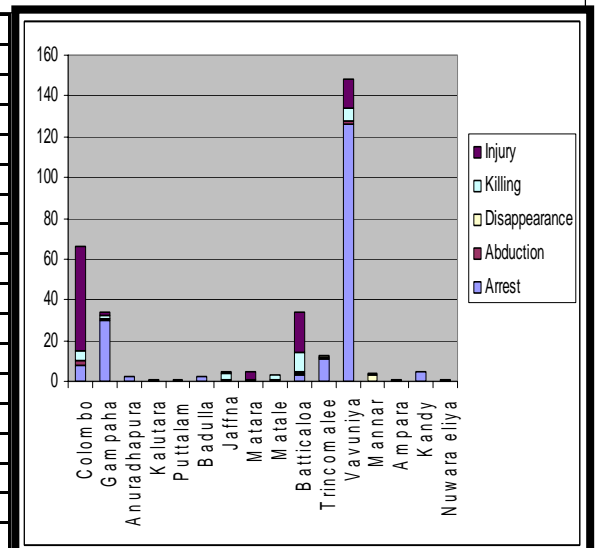
If one could say Better late than Never it would a an advice from the former President, that the ongoing war between the GoSL troops and the LTTE will not be a solution to the ethnic conflict; only a negotiated settlement will only bring peace to the Sri Lanka.

HUMAN RIGHTS



Human Rights analysis for month of January 21st to February 20th 2009—The chart below focuses on violations as reported in various news sources available in print media and electronic media. (Daily Mirror, Island, Virakesari, Thinakural, Sudar Oli, Uthayan)

	Arrest	Abduction	Disappearance	Killing	Injury
Colombo	8	2		5	51
Gampaha	30	1		1	2
Anuradhapura	2				
Kalutara				1	
Puttalam			1		
Badulla	2				
Jaffna			1	3	1
Matara				1	4
Matale			1	2	
Batticaloa	3	1	1	9	20
Trincomalee	11	1	1		
Vavuniya	126	2		6	14
Mannar			3	1	
Ampara				1	
Kandy	5				
Nuwara Eliya			1		
	187	7	9	30	92



Mullaitivu (Not included in the graph)
1030 civilians were killed and 2875 civilians were injured in shell attacks in "safe zone"

17 civilians were deliberately shot & killed on 10th of Feb by unidentified perpetrators.

Colombo
Two people were killed and a total of 50 injured when the LTTE attempted to take on targets within Colombo city and Katunayake

Batticaloa
A Bomb fixed to a bicycle kept at the patrol

shed in front of the Batticaloa Police station exploded around 7.30 a.m. today (21) killing two personnel and injuring ten more. Among the killed were a Police Sergeant and one civilian while two Policeman, four students, one teacher one nurse and two other civilians were admitted to hospital.

Police are conducting further investigations.

Members of TMVP were targeted by unidentified gunmen.

Trincomalee

Totally 11 civilians were arrested as suspected LTTE.

Vavuniya

According to TNA reports 122 relatives who

came with injured patients from Vanni to Vavuniya hospital were housed in Nelunkulam camp.

Sri Lanka security forces have arrested four local employees of India's Sun TV network in Vavuniya, suspecting links with the LTTE.

Suspected LTTE cadre lobbed a grenade and opened fire at a bus transporting civil-

ians out of Sri Lanka's war zone on Saturday, killing one woman and wounding 13.

Mannar

Since Feb 5th A Husband, wife and their 3 months old baby have disappeared

(For further information please mail to hrodu2@cha.lk, hrac1@cha.lk)

ECONOMIC CONTEXT



The economy produced mixed news during the month. Almost all the disturbing news came from the external sector. It was reported that of the 350 garment factories in operation in 2007 about 60 to 70, mostly relatively small units, had been shut down in the past fifteen months reducing employment in the sector from 300,000 to about 280,000.

Sri Lankan financial institutions have not been exposed to the toxic assets in the global financial crisis. However, the crisis has produced a Sri Lankan variant of toxic assets. These are unrecoverable loans given to local industries that are suffering from the loss of markets. There is no market for the machinery that has been used as collateral and the banks can't recover the loans. The Central Bank continued to assert that the country had "adequate" foreign reserves. At the end of 2008 official reserves were \$1.8 billion - equal to six weeks of imports - and with unofficial reserves the total was about \$3.0. Falling import prices have helped. But export earnings may fall. Tea and rubber prices are weak. Tourist arrivals plummeted 32% in January 2009 compared to the same month last year. Earnings remitted by our migrant workers may also decline. Foreign direct investment won't improve in the near term and com-

mercial borrowing is both difficult and expensive. The Central Bank is unlikely to raise the targeted \$500 million from "Diaspora Bonds" that it started selling last month. The Central Bank is also negotiating for currency swaps. The goal is to avoid having to go to the IMF for assistance that invariably comes with conditions attached that may be unacceptable to the government. The Central Bank also pegged the rupee-dollar rate around Rs 114 through the month.

Fitch Ratings downgraded Sri Lanka's long-term foreign and local currency issuer default ratings (IDRs) from stable to negative on the grounds that the foreign reserve position has weakened. The Central Bank publicly criticized the revision as unwarranted.

The loss of public confidence in finance companies following the collapse of Golden Key Credit Card Company persisted. Unconfirmed reports claimed that some finance companies were losing deposits. The Central Bank announced a stimulus package that it said was worth Rs 4.25 billion to assist finance companies and leasing companies that required additional liquidity. Under the proposed scheme these companies have been permitted to "sell" the land

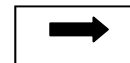
they own in exchange for treasury bonds that can be discounted in the bond market. The good news of the month was the decline in the rate of inflation from 10.7% in January to 7.6% in February, the lowest monthly rate in the last three years. The drop in oil prices and other commodity prices played a major role in this decline. Central Bank's tight monetary policy that held bank credit growth in 2008 to 6% compared to 20% in 2007 also helped.

Last month the government partially passed on to the consumer global price reductions in some products such as milk powder and gas. A part of the price reductions were retained by the government as tax revenue. This is good economic management to preserve macroeconomic stability.

The easing of inflation has allowed the Central Bank to relax its control on credit. To reduce interest rates it reduced the Reverse Repo rate from 10% to 9.5% and the statutory reserve requirement of commercial banks by 75 basis points to 7% which released about Rs. 9 billion that the banks can use to expand lending.

It was reported that in February business confidence was at a two year high. However, during the month the Colombo All Share Price Index declined by about 7%.

ENVIRONMENT



The Disaster and Emergency Warning Network (DEWN) was launched on January 30th as collaboration between the Disaster Management Centre (DMC) of Sri Lanka and Dialog Telecom Plc. This mass alert warning system utilizes the existing mobile phone network to send instant messages around the country in the case of an approaching disaster. The initial phase of the network is to communicate with emergency personnel in order to verify an emergency before sending to the wider public.

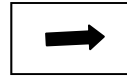
The Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Sri Lanka (FCCISL) has initiated an effort to improve the environmental sustainability of industry in Sri Lanka by targeting five separate enterprises representing a wide range of local industries. The program's method is to develop an

environmentally friendly model of carrying out common industrial practices that presently contribute to environmental pollution and/or degradation, with the hope that the methods developed can be widely adopted within each particular industry. The targeted enterprises include seed paddy projects in the Polonnaruwa area, lime kilns in the Matale district, desiccated coconut production in Wayamba, rice milling in the eastern and north-central provinces and fuel pumping service stations island-wide.

The increase in internally displaced persons (IDPs) who are emerging from the remaining LTTE-controlled areas in the north has numerous environmental ramifications as the government attempts to provide secure locations for them. Clearing of forested

lands, over utilization of the land, sewage and sanitation are some of the major issues that arise rapidly when there are sudden, unplanned congregations of people. Safe drinking water provision is also a priority as is the containment of any disease outbreaks, which are not uncommon given the combination of the poor nutritional health of people escaping, high stress from conflict conditions and crowded conditions. Re-settling these people is going to be a prolonged process as the war is still raging and it may be many months, or even years, before the situation has "normalized". The length of time IDPs are to remain in camps will have a large effect on the environmental problems that arise.

CIVIL SOCIETY & MEDIA SPACE



Commenting on civil society and media space in the month of February is difficult for two reasons.-(a) facile and the farcical has to be avoided in the case of media (b) Civil society is in deep slumber or perhaps in self induced hibernation.

The relentless war waged in the north continued to dominate the front and op-ed pages of all print media and the news presentations of most electronic media . The resulting debate on the diametrically opposed views of the GOSL and the Tamil Tigers served only to prolong the agony of those thousands of innocent victims sandwiched between the Government forces and the desperate rebels. The LTTE according to independent international observers has "deliberately prevented civilians under its effective control from fleeing to areas away from the fighting, unnecessarily and unlawfully placing their lives at grave risk. As the LTTE has retreated in the face of SLA offensive operations, it has forced civilians to retreat with it, not only prolonging the danger they face, but moving them further and further away from desperately needed hu-

manitarian assistance. And as the area that the LTTE controls shrinks, the trapped civilian population has become concentrated, increasing the risk of high casualties in the event of attack and placing greater strains on their living conditions*.

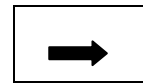
The appeals made by the International Community filled the pages of the English and Sinhala press. Rightly so. However in the case of the Sinhala print media the emphasis on the humanitarian disaster of the Civilian Tamil population got eclipsed by the reports on the Provincial Council Elections. It was certainly not deliberate or intentional. Perhaps a minute degree of insensitivity. Not certain.. A possibility.

The second observation allows one an uncertain glimpse into the future. It states "The UPFA continues to be strongly Sinhala-Buddhist in ideology....." and again "how the UPFA is going to reconcile this ideology in the minority heavy electorates of Colombo city, Beruwela and even Negambo at the forth coming Western PC Polls is yet to be seen." The purpose of quoting this editorial is not for its political content. It is to

compare this editorial with what appears in its Sinhala Sister Paper Lankadeepa of the same date (16th February) in its op-ed page. The Lankadeepa editorial commends the proposal to count the ballots at the polling booth itself. It is followed up by a lengthy analysis of the NWP and Central Province Provincial Council elections results by an Academic Professor of International Affairs of the University of Colombo Dr. W.M. Karunadasa . Comparing the results to the endorsement received by President Barak Obama the learned professor makes an interesting observation towards the end of his missive." Up until now we had a weak government and a strong opposition. But with these trends there will be a strong government and a weak opposition. That is what the country needs. This country needs a dictatorship within a democracy. By the term dictatorship what is meant is the ability to take decisions without prevarication." As stated earlier Civil Society is either in deep slumber or in a state of hibernation.

*** from the HRW report of Dr. Anna Neistat 24 Feb 2009**

HUMANITARIAN AND DEVELOPMENT SPACE



North

With the increasing conflict situation and areas under LTTE shrinking considerably, ICRC in their news release of 28 January, raised concern on the safety of civilians , as hundreds civilians have been killed or injured, and the inadequacy of the medical facilities and staff to meet the requirements. They strongly urged and appealed to both the GOSL and LTTE to facilitate the safe and voluntary movement of civilians. CHA and other concerned agencies also raised similar concerns as well and also requested the Government to ensure that the reception of those fleeing the conflict areas be according to International standards.

The Donor Co Chairs Norway, USA, Japan and EU called on the LTTE to discuss Modalities to end hostilities with the Government of Sri Lanka. The Government for its part rejected an amnesty but wanted a surrender and unconditional laying down of arms.

The IDPs are being housed in 13 locations in including schools, Technical college and University buildings in Vavuniya and in 4 locations in Jaffna and 3 in Mannar .. All IDPs are provided cooked meals through the GA, Divisional secretaries by the Ministry of Resettlement.

3 Task forces have been set up with the Following UN agencies in the lead:

1. Shelter and NFRI – UNHCR
2. Health, Education, WATSAN – UNICEF
3. Food – WFP

The GoSL plans to construct 3 relief villages of about 300 acres each; 1000 acres are being earmarked for clearing in Vavuniya and Mannar.

The government is taking the responsibility for the welfare and other needs of the displaced. The Ministry of Resettlement has requested I/NGOs to sign MOUs to work in these areas. A letter has been sent to NGOs to sign an agreement with MOR and only those who have signed will be allowed to work.

As at 17 February a total of 30,517 persons 7,832 families are in 13 Welfare centres in Vavuniya UNHCR and ICRC have full access to IDP sites but not to registration process at entry/exit point at Omathai .UNHCR is advocating on the access to the registration process and the need for Security personnel to be outside the camps and not within the camps and transfer of camp management to civil authorities

ICRC has evacuated a total of 1212 injured, by sea from 10th February to 20th February from Mullaitivu to Trincomalee hospital and others hospitals.

Mixed Food rations have been sent by sea through a vessels flying the ICRC flag to

Puthumattalan as convoys by land has become difficult; starting 10th February, 4 such vessels were sent to uncleared areas and injured were brought into Trincomalee hospital.

A suicide bomber exploded herself killing herself and 30 others including 20 military personnel at a reception centre in Mullaivu. UN and others deplored this attack and called on the LTTE to desist from targeting civilians. UNHCR together with ICRC and other agencies are helping to locate those who got separated from their family. ICRC togetherwith SLRCS through Restoring family Links system links family members inside the Wannu of their safety and location through messages to family members outside the Wannu

The UN Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) Sir John Holmes arrived in the country on 19th February for a 3 day visit. He visited the country concerning over humanitarian situation, and the safety of the civilians caught in the reduced conflict zone without food supplies and medical facilities. He met with key Government officials including the Senior Advisor to the President, Defence Secretary and Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Disaster Management and Human Rights. In these meetings he reiterated the need for the reception of those crossing the conflict areas to Government controlled areas to be in line

with International accepted standards and principles and appealed to the LTTE to free the civilians to move into areas that they wish. He had a meeting with the President where they discussed the plight of civilians in the conflict zone and the need for supplies of Food, medicines to be increased and sent to the beleaguered civilians in the Conflict Zone .

Sir John Holmes also visited Vavuniya where the 30,000 people have arrived recently to looked into welfare and needs of people in collaboration with UN and NGOs. The key issues and challenges ahead are the registration of persons being done in a transparent manner, the reunification of families, greater freedom of movement and the camps being administered by civil authorities.

The ERC has announced a US \$10 M contribution towards meeting the urgent humanitarian needs of those fleeing the conflict

East Batticaloa

Resettlement plan is ready for areas in Batticaloa. Thoppigala is cleared of Landmines and low risk certificate has been issued. Go and see visits have been planned but security clearance is to be obtained. Resettlement to Irralakulam in Chenkalady division delayed due to lack of staff for clearing the jungle areas.

Trincomalee

240 families to be resettled in Illavalai and Navaratnapuram. An agency has agreed to build the houses for these families. Fam-

lies that need to be relocated require 1400 houses to be built in the relocated areas. No firm donors as yet for housing for these families.

General

World Bank launched a competitive development marketplace for nutrition aimed at finding and funding innovative ideas that will change the lives of thousands of pregnant women, infants and young children in South Asia . Its reported that in Sri Lanka the recently concluded demographic and health survey shown that 22 % of children below 5 years are under weight, 18 % being too short (stunted) and 15 % too thin (wasted).

EXTERNAL ACTORS



The role of external actors significantly heightened with the country entering a decisive phase in Mullaitivu. Humanitarian concerns prompted a visit by Sir John Holmes who was called upon to brief the UN SC. An effort to name a special envoy by the UK for SL ran into turbulence. The Co Chairs called

for end to the war and a transition by the LTTE. India whose stance is still not fully discernable has in a new comment called for a 'pause' in the fighting. The country as a whole has come under criticism on account of human rights standards which can be better. The UN family and

INGO's have been deployed fully in discharging emergency functions in Vavuniya while ICRC does yeomen service in Mullaitivu. The US Senate hearing on SL had three very critical submissions while the Chairs comments were equally strong.

DISTRICT ANALYSIS

(PERIOD OF REVIEW-28TH JANUARY TO 28TH FEBRUARY 2009)

AMPARA

STRUCTURES

The latest brutal attack on civilians in the village of Kerimetiya, in which 21 villagers were killed, has shaken the district coming as it did after a few months of relative calm. The sheer brutality of the attack has shocked the people, while the security of border villages has been thrown into question more starkly than before. The people are once again afraid of stepping out of their homes for anything but the most vital of tasks, and routine daily activity has seen a downturn. Meanwhile the LTTE has denied responsibility for the attack.

As tensions within the TMVP also increase, the people are becoming more anxious, in fear that tensions within the party might translate into violence in the district.

As the Government continues its development work, especially in the areas of road

construction and irrigation, with the support of donor agencies and countries, community relations seem to be improving, helped along by the active involvement of local politicians to this end.

ACTORS

The Government Security Forces, the LTTE, the TMVP President and the Chief Minister, the Government, politicians and donor agencies can be considered the main actors in the current context.

DYNAMICS

The brutal attack on civilians in the village of Kerimetiya in which 21 villagers were brutally killed affected the dynamics of the district to a great extent. The incident could in the long term upset the fragile peace prevailing among the communities and contribute to even more instability in the district. Increasing tensions with the TMVP

is also a pivotal factor in the district, and public consensus seems to be that the consequence of escalating tensions within the party could be violence in the district.

STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS

The Rebuild Ampara Programme initiated by the Government has acted as a catalyst in building community relations, as political parties and community organizations are investing their joint efforts to uplift the district and bring about development.

Security in the border villages need to be increased, and equipping the villagers to protect themselves against any future attacks is essential, as is setting up an alert system so that the Security Forces can quickly come to their aid in the event of such an attack.

BATTICALOA

STRUCTURES

The recent brutal attack on a border village in Ampara has increased anxieties in the Batticaloa district. The tensions within the TMVP, which culminated in the expulsion of its President Karuna and the officer in

charge of the Ampara district, Mr.Eniya Barathi were also a focal point of speculation and discussion for the residents of Batticaloa. Several prominent TMVP supporters have been killed recently, and other random killings have also been reported.

A number of NGOs have reduced their staff as they downsize or scale down their projects, due to bureaucratic as well as financial restrictions, resulting in unrest and discontentment among the newly unemployed,

and could create tensions in the district, judging by previous experiences. This has also impaired the development work initiated by the Government, as the contribution of development agencies is often necessary for project implementation to progress.

A number of child soldiers were released by the TMVP, and TMVP President Karuna promised that all child soldiers in the TMVP would be released. His removal from the party however has brought into question whether this promise will be carried out by the current leader of the TMVP.

ACTORS

The former President and the Chief Minister of the TMVP, Government Security Forces, politicians, humanitarian and relief agencies, and paramilitary groups operating in the district are the main actors.

DYNAMICS

The removal of TMVP President Karuna from his post as well as his published intentions of joining the UPFA Government has created widespread discussion and speculation in the district as to the consequences of his decision. This action is also likely to create a temporary escalation of tensions between his supporters and those supporting other leaders within the TMVP. The release of a number of child soldiers and the promised release of all child soldiers in the TMVP created an atmosphere of hope among numerous parents, but the change in the leadership of the TMVP has thrown this promise into question, and increased anxiety among these parents.

The increase in unemployment is also an important factor to be considered in terms of the potential unrest it could create, espe-

cially among the youth.

STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS

If the Government is able to ensure safer working conditions for NGO staff, as well as a reduction in red tape, thereby enabling these agencies to carry out their duties more efficiently. As a result development work could progress much faster, while at the same time enabling the NGOs to function on a larger scale and retain their staff, thus speeding up development activity while at the same time providing employment in the district.

It is also essential that the relevant authorities as well as humanitarian agencies do their utmost to develop community relations within the district, in order to ensure peace among the district's civilians.

COLOMBO

STRUCTURES

The LTTEs attempted air attack on Colombo once again shook city's illusion of safety, as conversations centred round the LTTE's continued air capability, despite being reportedly confined to just a few kilometres of uncleared area. The aircrafts had reportedly been packed with over 200 kilos of explosives each. The attacks resulted in two deaths and over 50 people being injured.

The forthcoming Western Provincial Council elections are taking up much of the time and effort of political parties in the district. The Dayata Kirula exhibition was also a major event in the city, as crowds of over 100,000 visited the exhibition, which showcased among other things, LTTE weaponry recovered during battles.

Meanwhile, the sharp rise in the incidence of Dengue in the district is cause for concern, and the CMC is repeatedly cautioning the public to ensure that mosquito breeding grounds are cleaned and destroyed.

ACTORS

The LTTE, Government Security Forces and political parties are the main actors in the current context.

DYNAMICS

The abortive air attack on the capital has once again shaken the illusion of safety the people of the district are often under. As the war progresses, tensions in the city are rising in fear of repercussions in the form of more attacks. While a majority of the people of the district seem confident that the war will indeed end by April this year, as

promised by the Government, sceptics also abound.

The cost of living continues to increase, and people are buckling under the increasing burden. Gas prices were reduced by over Rs. 300, bringing some relief to the people, but a corresponding reduction in the prices of goods and services is yet to be seen.

STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS

The public needs to be continually reminded of the need for constant vigilance as well as security precautions, such as staying away from security areas in the city. The relevant authorities also need to ensure that the city's homes and public areas are kept clean and mosquito free in order to prevent the spread of Dengue and Chikungunya.

JAFFNA

STRUCTURES

A large number of civilians are reportedly trapped in LTTE controlled pockets in the Mullaitivu, as fighting rages on between the LTTE and Government troops. The Government and many international organizations have expressed concern over the plight of the civilians who travel to Jaffna and Vavuniya during last two months. A total of 700 families have arrived by boats in Jaffna, reportedly.

Security is tight in the peninsula and random cordon and search operations continue, with the main focus being on preventing the infiltration of LTTE cadres into Jaffna, presumably posing as IDPs.

In the face of stringent security and fierce fighting, paramilitary active has reportedly reduced dramatically.

The price of goods and services in the peninsula has reduced, while the supply of goods and services seems comparatively more plentiful. Prices are expected to further decrease if the A9 road is opened for the transportation of goods.

ACTORS

The Government Security Forces and the LTTE, as well as the IDPs are the main actors in the current context.

DYNAMICS

The plight of civilians trapped in Mullaitivu is a great source of concern for the people of the district, as well as Government authorities. The public is expecting an escalation in the war in the coming months, and are greatly concerned about the plight of their relatives in Mullaitivu Humanitarian organizations called upon the Government and the LTTE to avoid civilian casualties

and allow the free movement of civilians. UNICEF has charged the LTTE with conscripting child soldiers.

STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS

The Government and humanitarian agencies need to prepare to deal with a surge in the influx of IDPs as the battle in the North intensifies. To this end, the relevant authorities need to speed up the landmine clearing process in areas identified for resettlement, in order to enable the existing IDPs to be resettled and make way for new IDPs. This would also reduce the burden on the State and other donor agencies of providing essential items and services to the IDPs.

It also has to be recognized that psychological counselling is also a must for a majority of the IDPs who have endured great mental and physical trauma and is as importance as catering to the IDPs physical needs.

MANNAR

STRUCTURES

As the Sri Lanka Army continues to forge North and capture rebel territory, the influx of IDPs into Mannar has increased, with three additional camps being opened for over 800 new IDPs, while several hundreds more are reportedly awaiting transportation from Visawamadhu and Udayarkattu. Over 100 patients were also transferred to the Mannar hospital from Vavuniya, while a few hundred more are expected to arrive from Trincomalee. Several residents have been diagnosed with Dengue and Chikungunya in the last few weeks.

IDPs in the Musalai area who were asked to vacate their homes one and a half years ago are now agitating for early resettlement. The State has however informed that this will not be possible until the land allocated for resettlement is cleared of landmines.

Security in the area has been intensified and civilian movement, especially from the North to other areas of the country has reportedly been restricted.

Meanwhile, mobile phone and CDMA coverage and the broadcast of news programmes

of private television stations have been discontinued.

Paramilitary groups are now operating in the area with impunity, with some groups reportedly holding meetings with traders to demand monthly cash donations.

UNOPS has started a drainage project in Mannar, resulting in the employment of several youth in the area. There has also been a noticeable improvement in relations between the Armed Forces and the general public.

ACTORS

The Government Security Forces, humanitarian and relief organizations, IDPs and paramilitary groups operating in the area are the main actors in the current context.

DYNAMICS

Strengthened security in the area has created some anxiety among the public, as they fear an imminent escalation in fighting. Many civilians are also reportedly unhappy about regular and unannounced travel restrictions, which affect patients seeking medical treatment as well as job seekers and those seeking to travel abroad,

all necessitating travel to other parts of the country.

Travel restrictions in the Kalimottai and Sirukandal IDP camps have been relaxed somewhat, with IDPs being permitted to leave the camp as long as one family member remains behind. This has improved the outlook of the IDPs and is a measure which could be adopted in other IDP camps as well.

STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS

The Government needs to identify income generating activities in the district, and encourage residents to embark on such ventures, in order to discourage the district's youth from joining paramilitary groups due to frustration and a lack of means to support themselves with.

The Government also needs to formulate a clear strategy for landmine clearance and work with humanitarian and relief organization to speed up the process, so that resettlement activity can take place as soon as possible.

TRINCOMALEE

STRUCTURES

Security in Trincomalee continues to be tight, with regular cordon and search operations being carried out, and several arrests made during the reporting period.

Hundreds of civilian casualties of the war, including children, were transported from Puthukkudiyiruppu and the Wannai to the Trincomalee General Hospital. The General Hospital and other hospitals in the district are in urgent need of medicine and medical assistance to cope with the increasing numbers of patients.

Several IDPs living in welfare camps at Allas Garden in Trincomalee which was set up in 1990 have resisted resettlement, as they argue that they have established employment and income generation in the area after nearly two decades, and that resettlement will deprive them of their livelihoods.

A new system of meeting IDP needs has

been formulated, where instead of various authorities and humanitarian organizations catering to their needs, all aid and assistance will now be handed over to the DPDHS office and selected officials will then co-ordinate the distribution of aid to the IDP.

ACTORS

The Government Security Forces, the LTTE, medical personnel and IDPs can be considered the main actors.

DYNAMICS

The Health authorities are finding it difficult to accommodate the increasing influx of patients into the district, and medicines and medical personnel are in short supply.

The resettlement of IDPs has been temporarily stalled as all relevant authorities and humanitarian agencies prepare to meet the urgent need for relief assistance posed by the massive influx of IDPs from the Wannai.

In view of the influx of IDPs, security in the area has been strengthened, as troops attempt to identify any LTTE cadres attempting to infiltrate the district posing as IDPs. The increase security has resulted in a restriction in movement and travel for a majority of the public.

STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS

The relevant authorities need to ensure that extra supplies of medical items as well as emergency teams of the medical personnel are deployed to the district to cope with the growing number of civilian casualties.

Several humanitarian organizations are also reportedly unhappy about the new system of the Government taking over and co-ordinating aid to the IDPs. Any such system will have to have in place necessary checks and balances to ensure transparency and accountability.

VAVUNIYA

STRUCTURES

As the war intensifies at Mullaitivu towards the Puthukudirruppu area, large numbers of IDPs are pouring into the district daily. A total of 7,332 families consisting of 30,517 IDPs have been reported at the time of reporting. More than a dozen educational institutions such as schools, universities

and technical colleges have been taken over to accommodate the IDPs, while more buildings are being taken over to accommodate the expected increase in IDPs. A large majority of the IDPs had reported walked through more than 10km of jungle for three days to reach the cleared areas. Most of them were reported to be dehy-

drated and suffering from malnutrition. This is also reportedly due to the fact that from the beginning of the month no food convoys were reaching Mullaitivu, except for one ship which carried a few tons of food from Trincomalee to Puthukudirruppu.

The ICRC has transported over 600 pa-

tients seriously injured by gun shots, artillery, shelling and other warfare, in ambulances and WFP food convoy lorries to the Vavuniya hospital. An emergency team of medical staff has arrived in Vavuniya to assist with the influx of patients at the hospital, as well as to deal with lesser illnesses and injuries at the IDP camps.

Upon arrival in the cleared areas, many families have been separated with members living in various camps due to security screening procedures, seemingly contributing to much mental trauma among the IDPs. While the Government has established some shops, banks and co-operatives in the camps, the IDPs who have fled the war with no money and little personal belongings, are unable to benefit from these measures and unable to meet some of their pressing needs, thereby leading to a sense of frustration and hopelessness among them.

Meanwhile, train services have resumed, bringing relief to the residents of Vavuniya. The culture of impunity seems rife in Vavuniya, with reports of killings, abductions and ransom demands. The residents also seem to live in an atmosphere of fear, due to paramilitary groups roaming the district, as well as the sometimes intimidating pres-

ence of a large number of security personnel.

ACTORS

The IDPs, humanitarian and relief agencies, Government authorities and Security Forces, and the LTTE are the main actors in the Vavuniya district.

DYNAMICS

Many parents are worried about the disruption to studies that the closure of schools in the district will cause. The large number of permanently war wounded, as well as families deprived of their breadwinners are placing an ever increasing burden on the state, as they rely on the state for essential items and services. The increased burden is becoming harder to bear, both by the authorities as well as humanitarian agencies, as relief and assistance is being spread thinner throughout the IDP camps.

STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS

The Government needs to give priority to the welfare shelters provided by IDPs, as currently they are in a near uninhabitable condition. The shelters are cramped, unsanitary and inadequate, providing little shelter from the elements as well as the spread of communicable diseases.

The resettling process is also progressing sluggishly as some identified lands are yet to be cleared of landmines. More medical assistance is needed in the camps, while the psychological welfare of the residents who have undergone a great deal of mental and physical trauma also needs to be attended to.

Paramilitary activity needs to be stopped before it spirals out of control and the Government finds itself with another war to wage. Generating employment might be a solution, as many members of paramilitary groups often turn out to be youths who are unable to find employment, resulting in frustration.

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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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