



RAPID CONTEXT ASSESSMENT

National Analysis

Executive Summary

Political	2
Governance	2
Human Rights	3
Economic	4
Civil society & Media	5
Environment	6
Humanitarian & Development Space	7

Province Analysis

North	
Jaffna	7
Vavuniya	8
Mannar	8
East	
Batticaloa	9
Trincomalee	9
Ampara	10
West	
Colombo	10

Trend Analysis

Political	→
Governance	↘
Human Rights	↓
Economic	→
Environment	↘
Civil society & Media Space	→
Humanitarian & Development Space	→

Indicator References

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

The major political development of the month concerned continued international pressure on Sri Lanka from UN and western countries to address possible human rights violations in the last phases of the war, most notably accountability for possible “war crimes.” The UN Secretary General appointed a three-member team to advise him on the issue. US and UN sent high-powered official delegations to Colombo to discuss the issue. Sri Lanka’s foreign minister visited UN and USA to explain Sri Lanka’s strong opposition to what it calls unwarranted international interference in the country’s domestic affairs. President Rajapaksa appointed a “Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission” as its alternative approach in the hope that it would satisfy the international community.

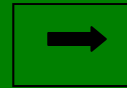
The state media, as one would expect, reported the appointment of the three-person UN advisory panel on Sri Lanka in condemnatory language. Some of the leading private newspapers also followed suit. The main local political news was the continuing turmoil in the main opposition UNP over its leadership and future direction. Some quarters have questioned the attempt of the government to hurriedly pass constitutional amendments and have called for proper public debate before such action is taken. Those expressing concern include the Bar Council, Organization of Professional Associations, columnists in the Sinhala weekly Ravaya and some eminent constitutional lawyers. The question of good governance and human rights continue to hinder the government’s ambi-

tionous post-war economic development programme. The EU sent a series of fifteen demands concerning human rights that it wants the government to comply with in order to continue the GSP+ duty concessions for exports from Sri Lanka. Colombo has flatly refused to accede to the demand. The highest circulating Sinhala newspaper, Lankadeepa, in one of its Sunday editions published a false report that the EU has extended the GSP+ plus by another six months. Such reporting calls into question the integrity of the local press. The government in its budget for 2010 allocated Rs 202 billion which is Rs 24b, - up 13.5% on the 2009 spending – clearly in the belief that national security remains its top priority. Critics note that this fails to take into account the need for reconciliation and peace building that must come in the form of a budgetary peace dividend with less for the military and more for social welfare, IDP rehabilitation and economic development. The scope for additional government spending is limited by the need to limit the budget deficit to a level acceptable to the IMF. The latter released the third tranche of the standby loan on the understanding that the deficit would be cut in 2010 and beyond to a more sustainable level than the current 9%.

Several incidents and events during the month drew attention to the question of child rights in the country. One negative was the existence of child labour in the country. Another was the Ministry of Health finding that 46% of the children in the north and east were malnourished. Rural districts in the South and estate areas also reported high rates of malnutrition. On the positive side LTTE child soldier rehabilitation reported fur-

ther progress. The number of IDPs in the Vanni dropped to about 50,000 by the end of the month. In the East 42,000 IDPs are widowed women, many with children. This group needs special assistance. The president has ordered that the remaining 50,000 IDPs must be resettled in the next two months. A concessionary loan scheme for IDPs for housing has also been launched. Some prisons reforms were announced during the month. Most notably the government will release prisoners convicted for petty theft and the inability to pay small fines for petty offences. The main goal is to reduce congestion in prisons and cut cost to the government. The police recruited 269 Tamil men and women to its rank mainly to serve in the north. This is a major step that will help the reconciliation process. On the environment front, the South West Monsoon was in full swing during the month causing floods in many parts in the south west of the country. In contrast Ampara reported draught conditions and a shortage of drinking water in some parts of the district. The lack of a systematic method for solid waste disposal came into focus yet again as carelessly dumped waste made into the canal system in some urban areas in Colombo. The National Elders Secretariat reported that the number of complaints from old-aged people who do not have adequate food and basic care is on the rise. This fore-warning of a crisis in the making as the number of Sri Lankans in the above 60 age category rises rapidly in the next two decades.

NATIONAL ANALYSIS 25/05/2010 TO 26/06/2010



POLITICAL CONTEXT

The month of June saw many important events some of which could shape the future of Sri Lanka. There was first the Appropriation Bill tabled in Parliament with a significant allocation for defence spending and a modest amount set aside for rehabilitation programs.

Then there were the continued saga of the UNP falling apart and the visitation of representatives of US President Barack Obama and the United Nations Secretary General. Hot on the heels of President Mahinda Rajapakse's appointment of the "Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission" headed by former Chief Justice C. R. de Silva was the visit by US President's representative Samantha Power who is the Special Assistant to

the President on Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights and UN Secretary General's representative Lyn Pascoe, Under Secretary General for Political Affairs at the United Nations.

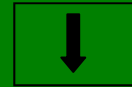
The UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has named the three-member team to advise him on human rights issues relating to Sri Lanka. The team is headed by former Indonesian Attorney General Marzuki Darusman. The other members are American Lawyer Steven Ratner, and former member of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission Yasmin Sooka. However, Japan's Special Envoy Yatsushi Akashi who is no stranger to Sri Lanka tells reporters in Colombo that the UN panel 'should not' interfere in Sri Lanka but only offer advice and

suggestions in consultation with the government.

The international human rights team will study the implementation of the commitment on human rights accountability made in a joint statement in May 2009 by President Rajapakse and the UN Secretary General.

The UN stresses the importance of accountability as an essential foundation for durable peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka while India emphasizes a political solution. The UNP who is going through a stage of transformation will put to vote its leadership in August. However, Opposition and UNP Leader Ranil Wickremesinghe say that the UNP must stop the 'circus' and fight the Rajapakse dictatorship.

GOVERNANCE



MILITARY SPENDING NOT REFLECTIVE OF PEACE TIME PRIORITY

There was an anticipation of the government shedding its military focus after the completion of the war a year ago. The ending of emergency rule and reduction of the military budget became possibilities. However, the first budget proposed by the government after the war has become controversial even amongst those groups that fully supported the governments war effort. The high defense spending during the years of war could have been justified by the governments need to do its utmost to overpower and defeat the LTTE.

On the other hand, the government's decision to increase the size of the defense budget after the end of the war is not reflective of a peace time decision in which the need for reconstruction and reconciliation would be uppermost.

In its budget proposal, the government has increased the defence allocation to a record Rs 202 billion. This figure surpasses last years

defence allocation by over Rs 26 billion. The magnitude of the hike can be seen in comparison to the allocation for education which is Rs 27 billion and the budget for higher education which is Rs 20 billion.

The defence budget is so massive that it dwarfs the other ministries of the government, especially those that are directly related to the welfare of the general population. The allocation for health has been reduced by Rs 5 billion to Rs 53 billion, while the allocation for the Ministry of Resettlement is a mere Rs 3 billion.

The government's defence-heavy budgetary allocations can only be explained by a focus on the security of the state.

Government spokespersons have sought to explain the disparity between the budget allocations for defence and other ministries by pointing to the continuing security needs of the country. They have said that the government is establishing new police

stations and other security posts in the former war zones of the North and East. The preparations for such efforts are clearly visible on the sides of the roads in those parts.

The fact that one year after the end of the war, Sri Lanka is spending more on its military and so little on health, education and resettlement, which added together is only about half that of the military budget, is indeed a problem. If peace has truly come, as claimed and widely believed, the emphasis should at least be on economic and humanitarian rebuilding and not on military re-arming. While appreciating the peace dividend that has come in the form of freedom from terrorism, the majority of people are also anticipating a peace dividend that will bring economic and social betterment to them. Unless these expectations are also met the government runs the risk of evoking feelings of dissatisfaction and of being let down amongst the people.

HUMAN RIGHTS



Human Rights Issues

Human rights issues in Sri Lanka came under the international spot light during this month. The UN Human Rights Council has once again called for an investigation into the allegations of human rights violations during the war. The European Union has called for the implementation of certain conditions relating to human rights for them to continue to grant the GSP+ concession. There had been a debate in the British Parliament regarding the human rights issues in Sri Lanka. In addition there also had been visits by representatives of the United States and the United Nations to discuss the same issues. It is hoped all this will help to improve the human rights situation in the country.

Law and order situation

There had been reports of abductions and other high profile criminal activities. It was reported that four persons had been abducted from Kaduwela by persons who came in a white van. The number of the vehicle in which the abductors came had been noted and several persons had seen the abduction. There is also a report of a Bank Manager being abducted in Angulana while bodies of at least three beggars who had been killed, had been found in different parts of Colombo. The Padaviya police have arrested six persons, who had allegedly obtained money from errant traders in the area by posing off as members of a Special Consumer Affairs Authority's squad.

There was another instance of a newspaper correspondent being assaulted in front of the Courts at Mount Lavinia. The suspect is reported to have fled the area and the police are yet to take action. There was another instance of a gang kidnapping a 15 year old girl in a white van while she was returning from tuition classes in Colombo. It appears that this offence had been committed with the intention of obtaining a ransom. They are said to have demanded Rs.20 million

for the release of his girl but had later agreed to accept Rs. 2 million and had released the girl at Wellawatte.

These incidents could be an indication of the deterioration of the law and order situation in the country. The relevant authorities need to take note of these incidents and take appropriate action to reduce, if not end, such incidents.

Child Rights issues

The employment of children as domestic helpers continues to be a problem in Sri Lanka. Following a raid by the Child and Women's Bureau of the Chilaw Police it was detected that an eleven year old girl had been employed in a luxurious home in the Chilaw District. It appears that this child is from a poor estate labour family in the Nuwara Eliya District. Such children are denied their right to education and parental care. The practice of children from the estates being brought as child labourers to affluent homes is prevalent but not adequately publicized. It is therefore necessary when even one case comes to light a thorough investigation is done to detect those responsible for making such children available for child labour.

A report released recently by the Ministry of Health reveals that child malnutrition rate in the Northern and Eastern provinces has reached 46%. This was probably due to conflict situation that prevailed in the country during the recent past. Yet it is of utmost importance the rights of these children to proper access to food should be facilitated. They are the future citizens of these provinces. If no remedial action is taken swiftly it would result in the population of these provinces soon becoming unproductive and a liability to the state.

It is commendable that LTTE child soldiers, 108 boys and 90 girls whose ages range from 12 to 17 years, had been handed over to their parents by

the Rehabilitation Authority. These children had been denied many of their rights as children and appear to have been conscripted by force. Their rehabilitation which had been done at a leading Tamil school in Colombo. It is hoped the government would continue to help them in their own villages by providing them with the facilities to start life afresh.

Rehabilitation of suspected LTTE cadres

It is heartening to note that the government has decided not to take legal action against rehabilitated LTTE cadres. A group of 53 rehabilitated ex-combatant couples were wedded at



Source : www.rnw.nl

a mass wedding ceremony held at Vavuniya. These couples are said to be still undergoing rehabilitation and that they would be released once they complete the rehabilitation.

There are still nearly 10,000 LTTE suspects in custody. A survey of the detainees had revealed that 10 % of them had not received any education and that 80% of them had not even passed the 8th standard. Only about 4% had passed the GCE Ordinary Level and another 4 % had passed the GCE Advanced Level. A few had entered the university and dropped out while a few others are graduates. It is unfortunate that most of them had been deprived of their right to

education. It would be commendable if the government could help at least those who have not had any basic education to begin to study and learn, at least, to read and write. It is hoped the government would expedite legal action against those detained in respect of whom evidence of involvement in crimes is available and release the rest of them without being detained any longer.

IDP issues

A statement issued by the Re-settlement Ministry indicates that there are only 49,634 internally displaced persons in the welfare centres in the Vanni who are awaiting re-settlement. The Minister has undertaken to re-settle all of them within the next three months. He had further stated that already 226,306 persons had been re-settled in the Jaffna, Mannar, Vavuniya, Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu Districts. However, though a promise to pay them a re-settlement allowance had been made, there are many who are still waiting to be paid. There have been reports of

shortage of water in many of the areas where re-settlement had been effected. Due to the absence of toilet facilities people are reported to be using river banks for their toilet needs. Consequently there is diarrhoea and other diseases prevalent among them. It is therefore important that urgent steps are taken to renovate the infrastructure in these villages so that these people who have a right to live in these village would be able to engage themselves in gainful activities. It has been stated that among the IDPs in the East are about 42,000 women who had been widowed by the war. Amongst them twelve thousand have three children each. There is therefore an urgent need to attend to the needs of these widows on a priority basis and their children, who do not have fathers, be cared for.

The families of those who died or disappeared during the war face difficulties as they are unable to produce any documentary evidence of the loss of their breadwinners. It is

welcome that the government has taken note of this and has taken steps to issue death certificates according to the principle followed for tsunami victims who had been issued with their death certificates considering them as disappeared persons. It is hoped that this decision will be faithfully implemented and the war victims would be spared of the problems they are undergoing due to the absence of such a document.

Tamil recruits to the Police service

It was a welcome news that this month 269 young men and women from Jaffna had been recruited to the rank of constables in the Police Department. It is known that the lack of Tamil officers had been the reason for complaints to the Police being not recorded in own language when Tamils make complaints. It is hoped that they would be given training on how they could perform their duties without violating the human rights of the people.

ECONOMIC

Budget and Trade Dominate Economic Discourse

The much delayed budget for 2010 and issues concerning two of Sri Lanka's major trading partners, European Union and India dominated the month's economic news. Sri Lanka's annual rate inflation slowed to 4.8%. This was one good piece of macro-economic news for the government although the seasonal increase in food prices, especially those of vegetables, conveyed the impression that inflation was out of control in the economy. The official figures suggest that foreign exchange reserves also remained at a comfortable level above \$5.0 billion. Usually relative price stability and a substantial foreign reserve allow a government a little more leeway to have an expansionary budgetary policy to cut taxes and expand spending. This option, however, was not available to the government for one major reason, the high budget deficit that has reached close to 10%.

Last February. The IMF suspended the disbursement of the third tranche of \$408m of the \$2.6 billion stand-by loan to express its disapproval of the large budget deficit. The government has funded a substantial part of the deficit with Chinese loans that also help build high profile infrastructure projects ranging from power plants and the Hambantota harbor to a National Performing Arts Centre in Colombo. Some of these projects yield medium term benefits that boost output. Others will take a long time to yield an economic return but will eat up scarce economic resources. There is not much of a cyclical component in the deficit. Part of it can be attributed to structural factors such as pensions and servicing the national debt (Rs 787b for 2010) that are unavoidable. The rest of the deficit is caused by discretionary spending ranging from defense to consumer and producer subsidies. The government has taken a deliberate decision to increase

military spending by over 13% from Rs 178b in 2009 to Rs 202b in 2010. This together with the need to cut the deficit has negated any possibility of a peace dividend by way of boost in welfare spending for education, health and IDPs and the Rs 2,500 wage increase that candidate Mahinda Rajapaksa promised in his presidential campaign last January. The government plans to issue a ten year bond worth \$500m later this year to raise funds from the internal market. Sri Lanka currently has a long term foreign currency debt rating of B to B+ that is four to five grades below the investment grade rating level. In October 2009 the country sold \$500m in bonds due to mature in January 2015 at a rate 7.4%, about 5.0 percentage points above similar US bonds. What this means is that countries like Sri Lanka, Kenya, and Ukraine that have similar ratings can sell bonds in the global market but only at a heavy discount (high inter-



est) that attracts investors.

The government is optimistic about the near term and long term prospects for the economy. The GDP growth rate for the first quarter was 7.1%. Tourism is rapidly picking up and the government is targeting for 2.5 million tourist arrivals by 2016. This may be too ambitious unless there is a construction boom in hotels and guest houses.

The proposed Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CESPA) between India and Sri

Lanka was not signed during President Rajapaksa's visit to Delhi. The government has not released the official draft agreement. Some note that even the twelve year old Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with India has not benefitted Sri Lanka much. In particular they note that India uses non-trade barriers to discourage exports from Sri Lanka. They also criticize the failure of Sri Lankan authorities to issue certificates of origin in a timely manner. Critics also note that Indian investors have failed to use Sri Lanka as a manufacturing platform to export to India making use of the duty free concession. On the other hand those

who favour CESPA note that Sri Lankan business must be more dynamic and creative to exploit the large and growing Indian market. The manner in which a few Sri Lankan companies such as Damro the furniture manufacturer, have carved out a market niche for themselves are cited as examples. If the playing field is level –the government alone is responsible for that – what matters is not the size of the country but the quality, price and marketing of a good or service. That is how countries ranging from Belgium, Switzerland to Singapore and Malaysia have succeeded. Sri

CIVIL SOCIETY & MEDIA SPACE

The three member panel of experts appointed to advise the Secretary General of the UN provoked most of the Print Media to express their indignation of what they perceived as a blatant attempt to undermine the Sovereignty of this island nation. However the front page headlines related a story of its own.

The Caption of the lead story in the island was “NO VISAS FOR THE SNOOPERS” while the Daily Mirror announced in its banner headline NO VISAS FOR THE UN EXPERTS” The Daily Mirror was reporting. The Island was commenting. Not in their reporting of the story which was more or less identical. In both papers, The Captions on the other hand were conveying how they intend to shape or mould public opinion. The Sinhala publications were different. There was near unanimity that the appointment of the panel of experts was an attempt to discredit this proud nation state.

In sharp Contrast the State Owned Daily News reported the same story with the Head Line “FIRM NO BY GOVERNMENT “ with two strap lines in smaller print “Clear Case of Interference” and “ Impinges on Sovereignty.”

But there is another more serious aspect to this kind of reporting. For most of the populace the print media is the only means available for infor-

mation on how Sri Lanka is viewed by the outside world. No Sinhalese paper covers global events in a manner that allows its reader to arrive at an informed opinion on issues that concern our nation.

A clear example is the banner headline of the Sunday Lankadeepa – the highest circulating news paper in the country which is read by more than a million Sinhala readers, announced that the “EU HAS EXTENDED THE GSP + CONCESSION FOR A FURTHER SIX MONTHS “ Only two Sundays earlier. It attributed its story to highly placed sources. The events that unfolded later were a clear illustration of the adage that Witch doctors have a better success rate than Spin Doctors.

Apart from the State Controlled media which have its own constraints, it is baffling to understand why the private media has now reached a comfortable cruising altitude and is now completely on auto pilot avoiding both real and anticipated turbulence.

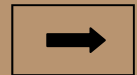
The Ravaya considered to be the pioneer of the alternative press makes its space available to divergent views. During the month of June it was perhaps the only Sinhalese journal that consistently promoted a lively debate on the proposed constitutional changes that are likely to be presented the contents of which is still under wraps. IN an illuminating article it

recently asked an interesting question. The Sinhala word “BAHUBUTHA” has been used on many occasions to describe the Present Constitution in an attempt to describe in a more picturesque sense its numerous shortcomings. For the purpose of this commentary we would use the word “Buffoonery”: for the Sinhalese expression “Bahubutha” The Ravaya columnist pauses the question: Is the Constitution an act of Buffoonery? Are we Bufoons ? OR does the term Buffoonery cover both the constitution as well as ? The columnist makes the obvious remark that the Constitution can be an act of buffoonery but no one who has come to power under this constitution has found it less enticing.!

It is indeed a matter for regret that debate is confined to a weekly Sinhala paper.

The Bar Council of Sri Lanka has appointed a special committee of experts to formulate representations concerning the constitutional changes that the Government wishes to introduce. It has also passed a resolution calling upon the government not to present amendments to the constitution as urgent bills. The Organization of Professional Associations seems to have woken out of its deep slumber to consider how best the Constitution could be amended.

As Dr.Nihal Jayawickreme an early casualty of the 1978 Constitution and



its legalized tyranny has commented in the Sunday Island of the 27th of June that both the 1972 and the 1978

constitutions were imposed on the people by the political forces that were in power who designed the basic

law to suit their narrow objectives. He makes an eloquent plea that constitution should be a social contract between the people and the state.

ENVIRONMENT



This years south west monsoon which brought heavy rains resulting in floods and windy conditions though lessened still continues. Flooding however is much reduced and most rivers are back to regular seasonal levels. Some districts such as Ratnapura are still experiencing heavy rains with the Kalu gangas water levels rising but subsiding within a twenty four hour period. Strong winds however still prevail causing tree falls in many areas.

What has been brought to the fore-

front once again viz a viz these torrential rains is the solid waste management (SWM) issue; large quantities of solid waste – garbage- have made way into the canal system and out into the ocean. The monsoon ocean currents have re-deposited this garbage onto many beach fronts. Not only is this pile up of garbage unsightly, its environmental and health hazards are wide spread. The current spike of dengue is a resultant of such situations that increase the breeding grounds for mosquitoes.

With SWM becoming more crucial in

many districts with high population densities a move towards some form of management at several local councils is being attempted.

The latest controversial topic in some of the environment forums is that of the CIC's (Chemical Industries Ceylon) banana plantations in the Kantale area. Although banana cultivations close to forested areas have been present in many districts for some years now (eg. uda walawe national park, lunugumvehera) it is perhaps the size and ownership of this venture that is raising deserved argument.

HUMANITARIAN & DEVELOPMENT SPACE



IDPs

Government Officials stated that the population in the largest remaining camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) is dwindling at a rate of up to 2,000 people a week, with efforts being stepped up for the remaining 50,000 IDPs to return home. On 28 May, the Sri Lankan president issued instructions to shut down the remaining camps within the next three months, including Menik Farm - the largest of the three - outside the town of Vavuniya and two smaller camps in Jaffna.

The new Minister of Resettlement stated that this August deadline is more "realistic". He added that the previous deadline of April was not feasible, describing the process as a "top priority" for the nation. The government is also planning to resettle Sinhala families, who were evicted from the North in 1985, in Madhu

Meanwhile Priests serving war refugees in northern Sri Lanka say they are concerned about the psychological impact on these people the longer they stay in their camps, saying that a

protracted stay in refugee camps could create further psychological problems for these people.

Lack of sufficient housing and infrastructure facilities is one major reason for the delay in resettlement. Aid keeps trickling in with countries such as India and Japan, and institutions such as ADB coming forward to assist. Instructions have been issued to the National Housing Development Authority (NHDA) to launch the first pilot programme of concessionary housing loans for the IDPs in the North in Kilinochchi. Under this scheme Rs. 325,000 will be provided for each house, and construction sites and families willing to construct houses would be identified by the District secretary within one month. Construction process would be completed within four months, and the recovery of loans would commence six months of the occupation of the houses.

Ex-Combatants

On June 13, a mass wedding ceremony was held at Pompeimadu campus hostel in Vavuniya where a group

of 53 rehabilitated ex-combatant couples were wedded. According to the former Rehabilitation Commissioner, this event was held due to a number of requests made by the rehabilitants themselves. At the same event the present Rehabilitation Commissioner stated that that the government has decided not to take legal action against the subversive acts of the former cadres of the LTTE that are undergoing rehabilitation. This is a positive step which sets the stage for reconciliation between the communities.

Meanwhile the government has also taken a lead in providing employment for these ex-combatants, with a batch of 269 young men and women being recruited to the police department from Jaffna to the rank of constable, and the Transport Board undertaking to provide jobs for 100 rehabilitated former Tamil Tiger child Soldiers. These youth are now being trained as drivers in a 3-month long training program at Sri Lanka Transport Board's Kondawil Depot in Jaffna.

The private sector has also come for-

ward to help with Chairman of Tri-Star Apparel Exporters (Pvt) Limited expressing readiness to recruit upto 1,500 currently held in military custody. These ex-combatants will be accommodated in a training facility to be established in Vavuniya shortly

Prisoners

Meanwhile, the Minister for Rehabilitation and Prison Reforms has stated that one of his prime targets is to reduce the number of prisoners by 50 percent. The Sri Lankan government is considering the introduction of legislation to release prisoners over the

age of 60 convicted for minor offenses as a starting point to ease the congestion in local prisons. They could possibly be released to do community work such as road repairs, construction, and public labour.

According to a report in a Sinhala daily, Sri Lanka's tax payers pay more to keep non-violent petty crime offenders behind bars than their crimes would have cost the public, with the Prisons Department spending around Rs.10,000 per prisoner per month to pay for the upkeep of overcrowded prisons, pay salaries of the officials and for food etc. The same report highlighted an incident where the

state is spending Rs. 30,000 from tax payers' money to keep a man in jail for stealing goods worth of Rs. 650. A judge has sentenced the offender for three months in jail for stealing a packet of cashew.

Meanwhile Tuberculosis is also said to be spreading among prisoners and jailors at prisons around the country with the highest number recorded from the Welikada Prison. A special ward has now been opened at the Welikada prison to house some 70 prisoners and detainees already reported to have contracted the disease, which is spreading fast.

PROVINCIAL ANALYSIS

25/05/2010 TO 26/06/2010

NORTHERN PROVINCE

JAFFNA

The opening of the A9 road to the public and the increasing traffic it has brought to Jaffna has not met with wholehearted approval by the public. The majority Tamil community in the district have voiced concerns that traders from other parts of the country, mainly the South, are moving in and attempting to monopolise the market.

While the number of foreign tourists visiting the district remains limited, due to them being obliged to obtain prior permission from the Ministry of Defence, a large number of local tourists are patronizing Jaffna.

Several new company branches have sprung up in Jaffna, as the district is becoming increasingly popular with developers and investors. A number of hotels, restaurants and inns have opened, as well as national bank branches, telecommunication companies are out in strength, while a few international bank branches are also to open shortly.

The financial services sector is receiving a further boost with leasing

and investment companies also going northwards, while the opening of a branch of the Colombo Stock Exchange in Jaffna for the first time in the district's history is also an encouraging sign of the economic stability the district is learning to enjoy.

Leasing companies especially are bound to enjoy increasing business as the recent reduction of vehicle taxes has seen a growing market for vehicle sales. However, the local community remains skeptical about these developments, as they are of the opinion that the financial services sector is currently geared to cater towards the Diaspora and not the local community.

Socially too, the district is making some progress. Several training sessions, workshops, meetings and advocacy sessions take place on a regular basis, both with Government and corporate support, with a view to developing the district's socio-economic landscape.

Several organizations have also come forward to help IDPs and re-settlers to

deal with the many issues they face, such as regaining land which is rightfully theirs, as well as livelihood difficulties they face.

The residents are urging the Government to take action over an issue that has recently developed – that of transporting sand through the High Security Zone.

Residents complain that they have not been allowed to enter their lands as some areas have been demarcated as coming under the HSZ. Jaffna is also attempting to deal with the rapid spread of dengue, exacerbated by the environmental pollution in the form of empty plastic bottles and mounting piles of garbage, brought on by the influx of visitors to the district.

VAVUNIYA

While Vavuniya's IDP population stood at over 64,000, many of them from Mullaitivu and the High Security Zone in the North, as at the beginning of June, by the end of the month, the number had been reduced to around 48,000, according to the GA Vavuniya. Due to new areas being cleared for resettlement, two more Divisional Secretariats are to be opened at Omanthai and Poovarankulam, bringing the total number of DS in Vavuniya to six. A WFP office is also now open in Killinochchi to cater to the needs of the resettled population.

Several children under the age of 5 who were separated from their parents during the Vanni displacement have still not been placed with their parents, although the relevant authorities continue with their efforts to reunite families separated during the conflict.

Meanwhile, 53 couples who were not legally married as well as a few new couples recently legally registered their marriages at the Pambaimadhu detention camp. With the registration, the couples will now have relevant paperwork, which is vital as they go about the process of rebuilding their lives.

The Vavuniya Magistrate and the po-

lice are investigating reports that LTTE suspects who were ordered to be rehabilitated have not been sent to rehabilitation camps, but are being kept in prison custody instead. Around 11,000 suspects are currently in custody, while another 14,000 are being held in various detention centers, with only 1000 suspects being released for rehabilitation thus far.

Following separate visits to resettled areas by TNA and JVP parliamentarians, the two parties submitted a report on their finding to the President, highlighting various aspects which require immediate attention.

The JVP report highlighted the need to provide children with proper educational facilities and opportunities to the nearly 22,000 students in the North, as well as the necessity to address nutritional concerns, due to the high prevalence of malnutrition among children in the camps.

According a survey conducted by the Ministry of Health, 51% of children in Vavuniya are malnourished. The TNA report meanwhile stresses the urgency of providing shelter and livelihood opportunities to the 200,000 strong resettled population.

Life is slowly but surely limping towards a semblance of normalcy, but logistical kinks remain to be ironed out. For example, the recently opened Sathosa branch in Killinochchi consists of 99% of Sinhala staff in a 100% Tamil area. Over 180,000 IDPs have thus far been released from IDP camps, but close to 40% say they now live in transit camps such as churches, temples, schools and abandoned buildings, as adequate facilities to support their resettlement, such as housing, is provided.

The Sri Lankan Forces celebrated the Vesak festival on a grand scale in the Vanni, with many Tamil businessmen contributing funds for dansalas. On June 18th, the State paid homage to the thousands of soldiers who sacrificed their lives for the country during the nearly three decade long civil war.

According to media reports, 23,327 soldiers lost their lives during the war, while 59,037 soldiers were wounded. A total of 80,000 people, including civilians were killed by the end of 2006. During the final stages of the war, from January to May 2009 alone, 6,500 civilians were killed in the hostilities.

MANNAR

Development continues at a rapid pace in Mannar under State direction. unemployed.

A new maternity ward was declared open at the Mannar Hospital recently, while the Chinese Government has been awarded the contract to develop the Mannar-Poonhari road, with 20% of the work being completed up to date.

Close to 90% of those resettled who have been unable to secure employment thus far, and have complained to State authorities that a large number of manual labourers in the district are

Following complaints lodged by politicians who visited the Manthai South DS division resettlement, regarding the plight of the IDPs, the 215 Brigade Colonel summoned a meeting with Government officials, NGOs and IDPs to address matters requiring urgent attention as speedily as possible.

Following the meeting, two medical camps were held to treat the numerous medical needs of the IDPs. A majority of the resettled IDPs were also given six months worth of dry rations by the WFP. However following numerous requests, the WFP agreed to continue providing rations for an additional six months, until the Maha harvest is reaped.

Before the eruption of hostilities, around 150 Sinhala families lived at

the Madhu road junction, peacefully observing religious rights at a nearby Buddhist Temple. Sinhala families are once again returning to the area, with 25 families having returned to the area up to date. The families currently live within the premises of the Buddhist temple in the area. The Vidathalthivu Jumma Mosque was also declared open for worship on June

25th, after a period of 25 years.

Education is a cause of great concern to parents in the district, as the facilities and opportunities available are well below the minimum standard. Over 20,000 university students have been released from camps to continue their studies. They have appealed to the Government and well wishers for

financial assistance in order to continue their studies.

The district's sole Public Stadium was handed over to the Urban Council by the Army, which occupied it for the last three years

EASTERN PROVINCE

BATTICALOA

The political scenario in the district has undergone some change, with the TNA and other Tamil political parties putting aside their differences to work together for the district's development, while Muslim parties are also supporting the Government in several development initiatives.

The Batticaloa District Development Committee headed by Minister Basil Rajapaksa has the support of the political parties in the district. The Committee holds regular meetings, and several action plans have been drawn up with regard to the development of agriculture, fisheries, infrastructure

and livelihood assistance. It is also reportedly planning to implement Gamaneguma and Jathika Saviya programmes in the district, which are a form of accelerated development programmes. Similar to the situation in Jaffna, land encroachment is a rising problem in Batticaloa, with the residents appealing to the state authorities to take action to resolve the issue.

Paramilitary activity has seen a marked decline during the reporting month. The rehabilitation has empowered the youth concerned to re-enter society in a meaningful manner and is gradually eliminating the danger they would otherwise pose to society. The

last batch of child soldiers comprising 108 boys and 90 girls were handed over to their parents by the Rehabilitation Authority. It is now up to the state and corporate sector, as well as general society at large, to ensure the seamless integration of these children into society, providing them with equal and adequate education and employment opportunities.

As a new era dawns for the country, political parties above all others must come together to work for the greater good. Encouraging communities to put aside their differences and work towards a common goal is the need of the hour and the only way to begin the healing process.

TRINCOMALEE

The district is unhindered enjoying peace and calm, and the quality of life is improving rapidly. There are no restrictions on public movement, and bus services operated daily between Jaffna and Colombo.

Licenses are now required for pedal motor bikes in the district, and as result teenagers can no longer ride these bikes. A number of local and international NGOs have reduced staff numbers due to inadequate funds to implement projects, resulting in an increase in unemployment.

The livelihood worries of the district are further exacerbated by the weather conditions, which are not conducive for fishing. Strong westerly winds have resulted in low catches of fish, driving the price of

fish up, and fishermen's incomes down. The Poson perehera as held on a grand scale with several Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims joining in the festivities. The Merchant Bank of Sri Lanka opened a branch in Trincomalee, and tractors were handed over to selected beneficiaries to mark the occasion.

Tourism is booming, and all hotels, restaurants and inns are fully booked over the holiday season. Many of these establishments have been renovated and have hired more staff to help cope with the influx, which has to some degree lessened the negative impact on employment caused by the retrenching of NGO staff.

Following a lapse of several years, T/RKM Sri Koneswara Hindu College

(National) conducted an exhibition at the school, which was visited by students from Vavuniya, Batticaloa and Jaffna. The star attraction of the exhibition was an overhead bridge constructed over the main road at the school's entrance, which enables students to make the crossing safely.

Also of note, was the opening of the Trincomalee District Media House. Funder by INTERNEWS-USA, the project aims to develop journalism and media standards in the district.

AMPARA

As the excitement created by the recent spate of elections died down, the people of Ampara have turned their attention towards the practicalities of everyday life. Paddy farmers who resumed cultivation after the war and resettlement reaped a good harvest. However they have voiced concern over the lack of an appropriate mechanism by the state to purchase paddy, which results in much of the profit going to middlemen. They have urged the Government to fix an appropriate price for paddy as well as implement an efficient mechanism to purchase and market the paddy. Apart from such matters, the district is enjoying the uninterrupted stretch of peace the end of the war has brought. Several joint community cultural activities and other events are serving to gradually build bridges between the communities. The Transport Board now operated night bus services to surrounding villages, and an easing of travel restrictions has made it easier for people to go about their daily activities. Paramilitary activity has reduced significantly, and development activity continues unabated. It is important however that the State ensures that the benefit of such development reaches all communities equitably, in order to avoid causing any tension in the district.

WESTERN PROVINCE

COLOMBO

The first anniversary of the war victory over LTTE, which was postponed by a month because of heavy rains, was celebrated on 18th June in Colombo. The event included a grand parade by the three armed forces as well as a display of military warfare, which was aired live by almost all local radio/ TV networks. Speaking at the ceremony, President Mahinda Rajapakse refuted allegations made by the international community of human rights violations by the Government. "Our armed forces comprise those who went into battle carrying a gun in one hand, the declaration of human rights the other, as well as taking food for the liberated people of the north and full of human kindness in their hearts." the president said. UN chief Ban Ki-Moon has appointed a three-member panel of experts to advise him on accountability issues relating to alleged violations of human rights and humanitarian laws during the final stages of the conflict in Sri Lanka. The three-member panel is to advise the UN Secretary General on implementing the commitment on human rights accountability made in the Joint Statement issued by the him and President Mahinda Rajapaksa after he visited Sri Lanka in May 2009. The move comes amidst repeated and strong protests from the Sri Lankan government.

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