

RAPID CONTEXT ASSESSMENT



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The convincing win of the ruling UPFA in the Western Provincial Council election further consolidated the political power of the government. Although the poll itself was clean and peaceful the campaign was not. The ruling party abused state resources and there was considerable violence and police inaction. The Elections Commissioner was almost totally ineffective. An Independent Elections Commission, Public Service Commission and a Police Commission under the 17th amendment are the only hope that is left to remedy the system.

The Government will hold elections for the Southern and Uva Provincial Councils later in the year. Parliamentary and presidential elections in early 2010 are a possibility. UPFA aims to secure a two-thirds majority in parliament to enable it to amend the constitution as it pleases. Smaller parties have opposed a plan to introduce a combined Proportional Representation and first-past-the-post system to elect members starting with local authorities and then moving up to PCs and parliament.

On the security front government troops have restricted the LTTE to a few sq km of land in the “no fire zone.” They also broke LTTE resistance to let out over 100,000 civilians who were trapped in the area. Another large number that could

vary from about 20,000 to 50,000 or more are still trapped in the area. The main concern is about civilian casualties caught in crossfire. The Tamil Diaspora demonstrated in several western capitals demanding a stop to fighting. Several senior UN and western emissaries visited Sri Lanka and travelled to Vavuniya to assess the

conditions of the IDPs. The government gave more access to UN and INGO/NGO relief workers to reach IDPs. It also took a few preliminary steps to increase civilian authority over the management of IDP camps and scale back the role of the military.

The government announced that it would no longer use heavy weapons in combat operations to minimise harm to civilians but refused to stop engagement altogether describing its effort as a rescue mission. Some have claimed that this policy is not implemented on the ground.

President Mahinda Rajapakse visited the former LTTE “capital” of Kilinochchi, an event that has obvious symbolic significance.

In April the government grappled with the difficult financial situation that the country was facing. The nation's international reserves were barely sufficient for a few weeks of imports. The technical negotiations for an IMF loan of \$1.9b to Sri Lanka were completed. But the Fund is under pressure from some quarters who accuse the government of human rights violations either to delay or deny the loan. The government is also expecting a \$500m loan from Libya.

The two foreign banks that were in

the \$810m oil hedging agreement with the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation have gone for international arbitration to get the money from the Corporation. The government raised the Nation Building Levy from 1% to 3% and reportedly is delaying refund of VAT to businesses.

Confident that inflation is now under control – it was 2.9% in April – the Central Bank further eased restrictions on bank lending to help business affected by the global recession. However, bank prime rates continue to be sticky hovering in the 19% range. Share prices moved up during the month possibly in response to the prospects of the war coming to an end. However, export industries continued to lay off workers and cut back work hours.

Localised high winds and minor floods caused property damage in several parts of the country. Two minor earth tremors, one in the east and the other in Sigiriya, have caused concern with even a warning to the construction industry to take cognizance of possible future earth quakes when constructing new buildings.

In Colombo solid waste disposal reached a crisis point when the Colombo Municipal Council was denied access to its new landfill by the residents of the area. In Vavunia the indiscriminate clearing of jungle to open IDP camps will have negative long term environmental consequences. On the plus side there was a noticeable fall in posters, cut-outs and polythene decorations for last month's Western Provincial Council elections.

INDICATOR REFERENCES

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

NATIONAL ANALYSIS - 28/3/2009 - 28/4/2009

POLITICAL CONTEXT



The continuous victory-run by the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) or popularly known as the "Sandanaya" has pushed their popular-position right on top of the list of registered political parties represented in parliament. This makes the political scenario for the government look good.

The elections to the Western Province is over and now what remains is the Southern and Uva Province which will be held either late September or early October this year with both Councils being dissolved in August. The Northern Province might be lucky to witness local government elections after many years followed by Provincial Council Elections but this too much later may be towards the end of 2010.

The Government firmly in the saddle having won six of the nine Provincial Councils and the war that has cost the LTTE very dearly

puts them in a position to take on either of the Premiere league elections – Parliamentary or Presidential. It is now evident that these two will be held after November 19, 2009 and before April 13, 2010. The Presidential Election can be held after four-years (last Presidential Election held in November 2005) and not before, according to the Constitution.

The President is also at liberty to hold a referendum but he would avoid a referendum since he is looking to grab more seats in the 225-seat assembly thereby permitting them to go through necessary Constitutional amendments or even a new Constitution reverting Executive power to the Prime Minister and Parliament.

New Election Laws are also in the pipe-line to re-introduce the First-Past-the-Post-System while retaining the already existing Proportional Representation (PR) System.

However the change in the electoral process will not favour smaller political groups which are lucky to be in parliament because of the PR System.

Already the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) has created a stir in the Eastern Province when it was taken up for debate. The government thought that they will bring in the new electoral process at the local government and provincial council level before trying it out at the parliamentary election but this is not to be at least for the moment.

All this talk of elections costs the Treasury, which is already hard pressed for cash, several hundreds of millions of Rupees and with a huge humanitarian crisis resettling around 250,000 Internally Displace People (IDP) it is going to be a juggler's nightmare.

GOVERNANCE



ANOTHER FLAWED ELECTION

The elections to the Provincial Councils for the Western Province took place on Saturday, April 25, 2009. No serious incidents of electoral malpractice took place on the day of the election and polling took place peacefully throughout the province. However, the peaceful situation on Election Day was in contrast to the situation that was faced by the contesting political parties and candidates during the period of the election campaign.

The role of the Police is critically important, especially during the election period. Their impartial and efficient action is essential in the conduct of free and fair election. The police made some attempts to prevent ille-

gal activities during the election. But this was not sufficient and many of the wrongdoers, especially if they belonged to the ruling alliance, were not apprehended. When election laws were violated, the Police should have acted more efficiently and in cooperation with the Election Commissioner's Department and the political parties. If that does not take place, it not only affects the conduct of a fair and free election but would also lead to an erosion of confidence of people in the electoral process itself.

Unfortunately, public disaffection and election monitoring by civic groups have proved to be having only a limited deterrent effect on this undemocratic and illegal pattern of behaviour. The Election Commissioner has frequently gone on record regarding the

need to further strengthen the powers he and his department are vested with in order to fulfill his mandate of ensuring free and fair elections. The machinery of law and order needs to work in an independent and impartial manner for there to be a change in the situation. This is why there is a need for civic groups and political parties alike to keep agitating for the implementation of the 17th Amendment to the Constitution that envisages the establishment of independent Police, Elections and Public Service Commissions. Independent institutions, and demonstrating respect for their purpose, are essential to enhance the credibility of the democracy practiced in the country.

SECURITY



Government troops managed to corner the LTTE rebels to 10 square kilometres, in an area between Vellamullivaikkal and Velayanmadam, pushing the LTTE towards the "no fire zone" and asked the LTTE leader to surrender within 24 hour. The ultimatum was not met with a response.

The 58 division of SL Army blasted a the three kilometre – long LTTE's earth bund in the Puthumathanlan area, the western border of the No-Fire Zone, which paved the way for more than 100,000 civilians to enter Government controlled areas. Government troops moved to this area after heavy fighting with the LTTE. General Officer Com-

manding of 58 division planned the rescue operation based on information received from ground intelligence and visuals taken by Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV). Several companies were divided into groups of eight to 10 soldiers and given specific tasks. The units involved in the operation were 9th Gemunu Watch battalion, 8th Gajaba regiment, 11th Sri Lanka Light Infantry battalion backed by 2nd Commando regiment and 1st Special Forces regiment. The main objective was to break through LTTE's final earth bund from Puthumathanlan to Ampalavampokknai. The 2nd Commando regiment and 8th Gajaba regiment had reached the northern edge of the earth bund, the 1st

Special Task regiment had taken the 11th Sri Lanka Light Infantry troops to the southern edge of the earth bund and the 9th Gemunu watch cleared the passage for the advancing troop as well as for civilians to move out. This was followed by the capture of the entire Puthukuddirippu area after three days of fierce battle, inflicting heavy damages on the LTTE. Among the killed were senior LTTE members including Theepan – LTTE former Northern region chief, Ruben, Nagesh, Gadhafi – former body guards of the LTTE leader, Vidusha – the leader of female brigade wing, "Malathi", Durga –head of the female regiment, "Soothiya", Kamalini – LTTE Women's Politi-

cal leader and Manniwannai – LTTE’s Artillery Wing leader. According to intelligence reports, the LTTE still possesses a light aircraft supposedly hidden in the “no fire zone”.

While the Government media announced the number of LTTE cadres, it failed however to state the number of soldiers killed in these battles. According to unofficial reports, 540 injured soldiers were transported to Colombo by the third of March.

In Ampara the Special Task Force killed 13 tigers in a gun battle. The STF believe this group was responsible for the recent attacks on civilians in Butthala in Moneragala and some other areas in the East.

After having declined requests from UN, US and UK for a Humanitarian Pause for over a month, the Government unexpectedly on Monday the 27th that they have decided to discontinue using heavy weapons in their military operations. This however followed statement made by Defence Gotabaya Ra-

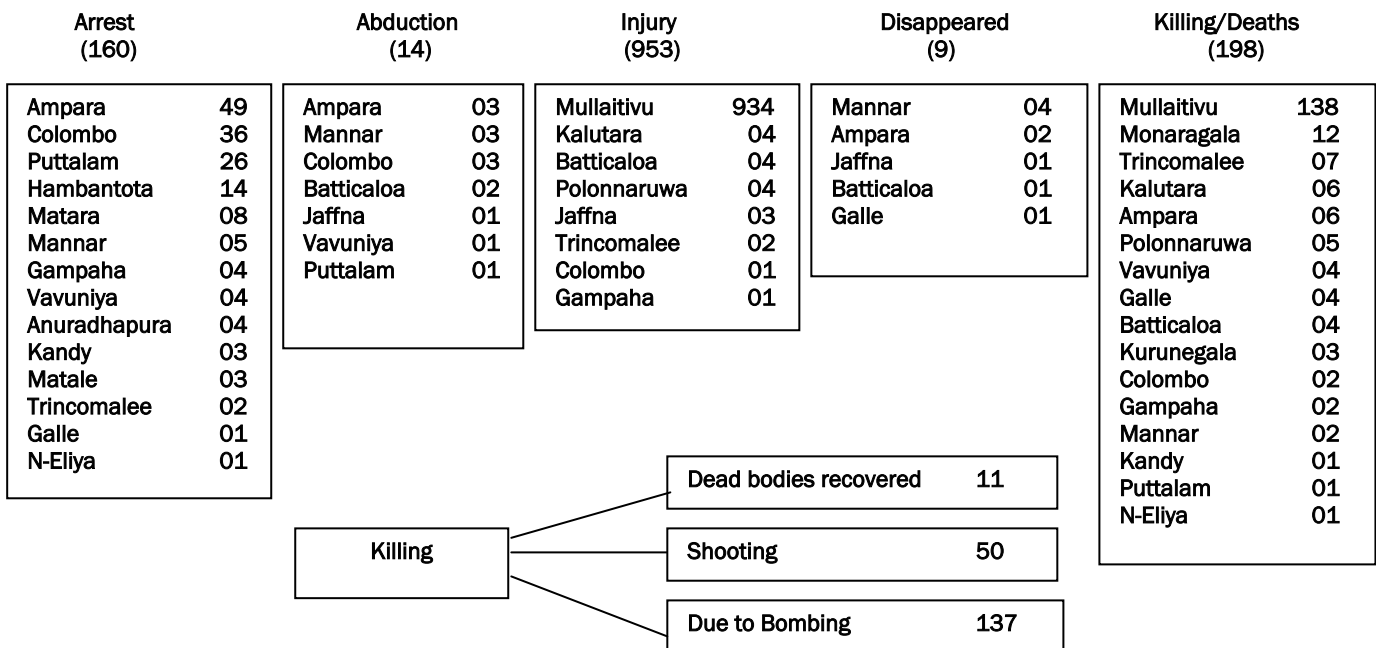
japakshe to the BBC during an interview that Government troops do not use heavy weapons.

Another significant event that took place during this period was the visit to Killinochchi by President Rajapakse during the New Year festive season, during which, he reportedly freely walked the streets and met with troops, IDPs and other civilians in the area.

HUMAN RIGHTS

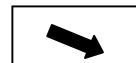


Human Rights analysis for the period - March 21st 2009 to April 20th 2009 - The chart below focuses on violations as reported in various news sources available in print media and electronic media. (Daily Mirror, Virakesari, Thinakural, Sudar Oli, Uthayan)



(Further info and statistics could be obtained from hrac1@cha.lk)

ECONOMIC CONTEXT



In April the Sri Lankan economy exhibited more signs and symptoms of a deteriorating financial situation that has the potential to reach crisis proportions if some of the remedies that the government is attempting such as the application to the IMF for a \$1.9b loan fail.

Negotiations on the technical issues concerning the IMF loan were completed towards the end of the month. On account of the situation in the north the IMF is under pressure from detractors of the government to delay or deny the loan. The government is also negotiating for a \$500m loan from Libya.

The government that is desperate for reve-

nue increased the Nation Building Levy (NBL) introduced in the 2009 budget from 1% to 3%. The government is increasingly resorting to ad hoc adjustments in taxes. To appease the public that complains of high prices it reduces tax rates but only to increase them in some other form to keep revenue flowing in. Businesses are complaining that the government is delaying the refund of VAT that it owes them.

The talks between the government and the five commercial banks that were involved in the oil hedging deal with the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC) broke down when the two foreign banks in the group, Citibank and Deutsche Bank, decided to file action for international arbitration through the

International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID). The full amount that the state-owned CPC owes the banks under the agreement is \$810m plus interest on the overdue amount. This amount possibly is well over half of the entire foreign reserves of the country at the end of last month. Thus having to pay this sum would have a devastating impact on the shaky finances of the country.

Inflation in Sri Lanka fell for the tenth consecutive month in April to 2.9 on an annualized basis. But the falling rupee is likely to push up inflation in the coming months.

The Central Bank, confident of low inflation, has been trying to ease bank liquidity to

encourage bank lending. In April the Bank lowered the repurchase rate to 9% from 10.25% and also cut the penal rate to 13% from 14.75%. The state banks have reduced lending rates by 2 or 3 percentage points to "priority" sectors. But the prime rates of the commercial banks that averaged a little over 19% in mid April have been sticky.

To help private borrowers who are increasingly hit by the recession the Treasury requested the Central Bank to extend the period when a bank loan is considered a "non-performing" loan from the current three months to six months.

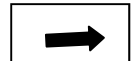
In April the Asian Development Bank approved two loans totaling \$160m to rehabilitate and expand the electricity generating and distribution capacity of the island where an estimated 20% of houses do not have electricity.

The informal arrangement that existed for the last several months in many businesses between employers and employees to cut down on work hours or temporarily lay off workers to cope with shrinking order books for exports was formalized in April. The government agreed to permit such practices subject to mutual agreement between employers and workers.

The two-year collective wage agreement between plantation workers and employers ended in April. The JVP which is trying to get a toe hold in the sector announced that it would demand a Rs 500 per day wage for plantation workers.

Share prices alone do not tell the full story of an economy. However, their movement gives an indication of investor expectations. In April the feeling that the end of the war would create new business opportunities would have helped move up the All Share Price Index by about 10%.

ENVIRONMENT



April saw a number and variety of small scale natural disasters strike Sri Lanka. Early in the month there were a series of high wind events: On April 04 in Chilaw in the northwest and Horana in the southwest 130 homes were partially damaged due to "tornado-force" winds; on April 06 35 houses were damaged and 4 permanently destroyed by high winds in the Nuwara Eliya district rendering over 100 people temporarily homeless; and on April 08 high winds hit Karuwalagaswewa in the Puttalam district affecting 50 homes. Heavy rains caused numerous minor flooding incidents around the island in the first half of the month, including in the Wannu where thousands of internally displaced were affected.

Two minor earth tremors were felt on the island; the first on April 15th was detected in sections of Ampara, Batticaloa, Hambantota, Badulla and Moneragala whereas the second, on April 21st was centred on Sigiriya. According to experts these tremors

were the result of the formation of a new tectonic plate ~500 kms south of Sri Lanka, closely aligned with the one that was the cause of the 2004 tsunami. Further tremors are expected to be felt with experts urging the construction industry to be aware and take this new development into consideration when undertaking new projects.

The City of Colombo has been plagued with a garbage crisis in April which has resulted in mounds of rotting refuse littering the streets. This has resulted from problems with disposal which have come about after the Supreme Court ruled that no more garbage could be dumped in the Blumenthal road landfill. The new dump site at Peliyagoda has been blocked to Colombo Municipal Council workers by protesting residents who are against the opening of a landfill in their neighbourhood. As a result of the backlog of garbage on city streets health officials have warned to be alert for a rise in dengue incidents as mosquitoes breed easily in these conditions.

An island-wide initiative was undertaken over the New Year period to plant 2 million trees under the slogan "Plant a tree today and pick a fruit tomorrow". It is part of the government's rural development program.

The Western Provincial Council elections held on the 25th of April were marked by a significant reduction in the amount of plastic party banners and decorations as well as a drastic cut in the number of posters adorning walls, trees and other available surfaces.

Finally, the unselective clearing of lands in the North - in such places as Manik farm in Vavuniya - during the temporary shelter construction for internally displaced peoples has had added to the misery of many. The cutting of large trees in many of these areas has resulted in a lack of sheltering shade and has also increased the effect of flooding after heavy rains.

CIVIL SOCIETY & MEDIA SPACE



With the war reaching its inevitable end it was indeed heartening to read Dr. Dayan Jayatilaka in the Daily Mirror of 17th April on a suggested road map for our tormented Isle.

In an article aptly titled "A STRATEGIC WIN, NOT A TAME DRAW" Dr. Jayatilaka writes why the speedy implementation of the 13th Amendment holds the key to a lasting peace. With beguiling candour he elaborates on his thesis. "Strategy and tactics apart, there are intrinsic reasons as to why Sri Lanka should commit itself sincerely to the full and speedy implementation of the 13th amendment. It is simply a matter of identity, autonomy and adequate space....." He elaborates " ... It is a question of devolving an adequate number of powers and functions to the people of those areas. No peoples like to be policed, patrolled, garrisoned and ruled by those of a different ethnicity and religion who do not speak their language....." He says much more and ends with the caveat 'The writer states that these are his strictly personal views.' It was a refreshing breeze in the English media.

Professor Rohan Gunaratne Head, International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research Singapore writing in the Daily Mirror of 16th April under the Caption "Ending the Sri Lankan Conflict" writes that Democracy, Devolution and Development will "consolidate the gains of conflict resolution, which was primarily a reactive or negative Endeavour of merely eliminating the causes of conflict, the imperative is to create, nurture and sustain good democratic practices as they are effective instruments of good governance. Good Governance transforms the ill effects of conflict....."

Commenting on Media Space in the month of April when Sri Lankans celebrated the Sinhala and Hindu new year, these points of view as quoted above appeared in the English media but not in any of the Sinhala press. In the same month Mr. Edmund Ranasinhe one of the living legends of Sri Lankan journalism (a former editor of Dinamina and Sililumina prior to state control, and later Editor of Divaina and the Island and also Editor In Chief and Director Editorial of Upali News Papers Ltd.) embarked on a very timely exercise of writing in the Island news paper of 6th and 7th April on the subject "WITHER OUR MEDIA". He begins in a note of mournful introspection. " This may be farfetched, but it does catch a sense of the bruised nature of the country's media..." A while later he arrives at another salient point. "...The nexus between media men and the politician is undisturbed. A relative

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calm appears to be in place. Nothing happens. Nothing is learnt. Nothing Changes....."Mr. Edmund Ranasinghe belongs to a rare breed. As a senior Editor at the time the State took control of the institution he served he decided to forfeit the privilege of serving the state. It is saddening for two reasons. Firstly this thought provoking probe in to the state of our media should have been written in Sinhala. Secondly most heads of Sinhala print media today learnt their craft at the feet of this maestro.

The Civil Society organizations that were active during the month were those whose task was to monitor the elections to the Western Provincial Council. They beat their

collective breasts regarding the violence that preceded the election and pronounced that free and fair elections were held on polling day.

With the global melt down and the major role that has been assigned to the IMF to resuscitate the faltering economies of the developing world, it has plans to utilize the resources available in the form of civil society organizations. To begin with it has defined what they consider to be civil society organizations.

"The IMF uses the term "civil society organization" to refer to the wide range of citizens' associations that exists in virtually all mem-

ber countries to provide benefits, services, or political influence to specific groups within society. CSOs include: business forums, faith-based associations, labour unions, local community groups, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), philanthropic foundations, and think tanks. Usually excluded are not only the branches of government (government agencies and legislators) but also individual businesses, political parties, and the media." In a society such as ours where every facet of life is influenced by the state the IMF may be correct in having the exit "Usually excluded". It will allow the unusual to be included.

HUMANITARIAN & DEVELOPMENT SPACE



The government reported earlier April that the IDP camps in Vavuniya which previously under the Management of the Army was now under the Ministry of Resettlement. Government has started the registration of the IDPs for National IDs with a view to improving the freedom of movement of these IDPs which is presently restricted once they have been issued. Permission has been granted for the elderly to stay with relatives

Prof Walter Kailin Representative of the UN Secretary-General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, appealed to save lives of internally displaced persons trapped by Sri Lankan conflict at the conclusion of a 4 day visit in early April where he met key government representatives and visited Vavuniya IDP centres. He stated that he was deeply concerned for the lives of over 100,000 civilians trapped in the 14-km square area of the Wannu declared by the Government as a no-fire zone. Large numbers of civilians already have been killed or wounded. Following reports that LTTE fighters now have been pushed almost entirely into this zone, he said that many more are at risk of losing their lives. He urgently repeated his call to the LTTE to allow all civilians under its control to leave this zone and to seek safety elsewhere. He also call on the Government of Sri Lanka to respect the no-fire zone for as long as a civilian population remains within it. There was a 2 day pause in fighting announced by the Government in time for the New year on 13th and 14th April to allow for the civilians to move out of the conflict zone. This was honoured by both sides and was welcomed by the UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon in a statement of 12th April who had been advocating for a pause to allow civilians to move out to safety.

The ICRC in a statement of 20th April stated that since 10 February evacuated more than 10,000 sick and injured patients and accompanying caregivers from Putumatta-

lan, in the area held by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The ICRC-chartered ferries Green Ocean and Seruvila have made a total of 23 trips, each carrying more than 400 people, to Trincomalee and Pulmoddai in government-controlled areas. These evacuations have saved many lives and bringing relief to the sick and injured who were thus transported.

With the breaching of the defences of the safe zone by the SLA, a path of escape was made available for the IDPs in the safe zone on 20th April. Thousands of civilians braved the firing from the LTTE to escape and amidst that 17 were killed and over 200 injured due to 3 suicide attacks.

The government has provided more resources staff and equipment to assist the displaced in Vavuniya. The Government has appointed as competent authority Major General G.A. Chandrasiri to coordinate all administration and implementation of all relief work in relation to the displaced.

UN Emergency relief coordinator John Holmes arrived in the country on 26 April for a 2 day visit. He met key government representatives and Officials and also visited welfare camps as well as the Omanthai screening point. The ERC has requested access for a UN Humanitarian team to conduct an assessment in the conflict zone. The conditions for this to take place have not been created by parties. He has also requested access by the International agencies to the screening points in Omanthai and Kilinochchi. Some 14 UN staff and approximately 207 NGO staff have not been able to leave the IDP camps and the conflict zone according to the UN humanitarian team. He has also impressed on the government for their release. The ERC has announced the allocation of US \$ 10 M from the CERF for relief.

During the period of 27 October to 27 April 2009 151,231 persons have crossed from the conflict areas. Around 149,421 persons

are accommodated in temporary camps in the north, This includes 31,040 families 138,203 persons in 23 centres Vavuniya 52 in Mannar, 3,698 families 11,166 persons at 12 centres in Jaffna and 5414 in Trincomalee. In addition 1,810 IDPs both injured and care givers are in hospitals in various districts as of 27 April.

There are reports of overcrowding were reported in some IDPs sites due to the influx of new arrivals. Camps in Vavuniya are reportedly holding an average of 18 persons per tent meant for 5, with limited water supplies according to the UN humanitarian team.

Health facilities continue to be an issue both in the conflict zone and in camps the CA has announced that a field hospital is to be built at each of the 3 zones and requested the local health authority to deploy 2 doctors on 24 hour stand by at these facilities. The French Civilian protection is deploying a Field hospital in cheedikulam with a team of 30 medical staff including 4 specialists

Water and Sanitation in the camps is a serious concern and does not meet international standards. It is estimated by the WASH cluster in Vavuniya that an additional 20 water bowsers to cover the additional influx along, with the 55 water bowsers presently being utilized is required.

The government is setting up an office in Manic Farm zone 2 to respond to the emergency and address the concerns of the IDP population. The office is headed by GA of Polonnaruwa and Kandy to respond to the situation.

ICRC is planning to load a 30 ton ferry boats with food and hopes to deliver 3 shipments to the conflict zone from Trincomalee as soon as possible. and also evacuate the injured in the safe zone

EXTERNAL ACTORS



A number of significant markers for the month. SL featured in several non formal conversations among SC members of the UN. Quite a bit of air miles have been accumulated by flying dignitaries in the form of ministers, delegations, combined with international phone calls. All of it had a common theme, concern about civilians in the zone.

Pauses which meant ceasefires. IMF loans which could be allied to international opinion. There was another group which was about emergency assistance, needs assessments, flying tents and flying sarees and sarongs along with pots and pans from India. 40,000 packs of it. No journalists were flown out of SL. Al Jazeera provided enormous amount of unpaid coverage. A bulk of

it unflattering news bits.

Masonry in some of our Embassies was worked on by protestors while Nehru's head was knocked off at India centre in London. SL Diaspora have high fever expressed through much indignation and gory visuals from the safe fire zone. All told a very eventful month.

DISTRICT ANALYSIS

(PERIOD OF REVIEW-28TH MARCH TO 28TH APRIL 2009)

AMPARA

STRUCTURES

The brutal murders of several farmers in some border villages in the district cast a blow to the relative peace the district was enjoying, and cast a pall over community relations, dramatically increasing tension. Intermittent security incidents also occurred in the district, especially in the border villages. Security forces shot dead 13 LTTE cadres in the district, during the month under consideration.

Rivalry between the Karuna and TMVP factions continues in the district. The appointment of Mr. Barathi as the President's Secretary for the Eastern Province has also had an effect on the district. Mr. Barathi's close monitoring of NGOs operating in the area has not been met with enthusiasm by these organizations. Several NGOs have reportedly begun further scaling down projects and operations and reduced their staff. This is in spite of the district, especially the

coastal areas, still being very much in need of humanitarian and development assistance.

ACTORS

Government authorities, the Armed Forces and the LTTE can be considered the main actors.

DYNAMICS

The brutal murders of farmers in the border villages of Ampara has been a great blow to the morale and confidence of the people, as well as the relative stability the district was enjoying for a short while. Civilians are once again besieged by fears for their safety and unwilling to venture out of their homes. This could upset the fragile peace existing between the communities and in fact adversely affect the Government's development plans for the district, as suspicions build up between communities and hamper their ability to work together harmoniously.

STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS:

Security of the civilians should be a priority of the authorities. Insecurity and fear among the population will hamper any forward momentum that would otherwise be possible for the district and prove detrimental to the district's development. The border villages need to be given special attention as they are at the greatest risk of attack from the LTTE.

A regulated framework needs to be formulated and adhered to with regard to the operation of NGOs in the district, in order to avoid arbitrary and inconsistent regulations being imposed on these organizations. Such a framework would pave the way for mutual co-operation and be beneficial for the district which is in need of humanitarian and development assistance.

BATTICALOA

STRUCTURES:

Batticaloa is enjoying a relatively more peaceful atmosphere than that of her neighbours. Security presence in the district is strong, and civilians are now confident enough to linger outdoors even after dark. The incidence of murders, abductions and other such paramilitary activity has reportedly noticeably reduced, as have conflicts between various political factions. In such an atmosphere, community relations have also improved, and development work and community building is forging ahead encouragingly.

Karuna's acceptance of the post of Vice Chairman within the SLFP has created considerable debate, as to the ramifications such a move would have on the Eastern Province. Some of the TMVP offices now sport name boards proclaiming them to be SLFP offices. The move has concerned

TMVP supporters in the district as they are unsure what changes this will bring about within the party.

Meanwhile, the abduction of a child in the district has sparked outrage among the people, following so close on the heels of the tragic death of another abducted child, Varsha Jude Reggi.

The postponement of the debate over the 13th amendment was also not met with enthusiasm by the district.

ACTORS

Member of Parliament Karuna, Government authorities, the Armed Forces and NGOs can be considered the main actors in the district.

DYNAMICS:

Karuna's decision to accept the vice chairmanship of the SLFP has caused consider-

able concern in the district and within the TMVP especially, as party supporters debate what these changes will mean for the party. The postponement of the debate over the 13th amendment also caused much debate over the district.

As the battle in the Wannu progresses, the district is eagerly awaiting the end of the almost three decade long war. The recent murders in the border villages of Ampara did however increase security concerns in Batticaloa.

STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS

The need for constant security vigilance in the district cannot be ignored in view of the recent murders in Ampara. Meanwhile, communities and local authorities should be encouraged to work together with the fullest co-operation in order to progress with development work initiated in the district.

COLOMBO

STRUCTURES

The situation in Colombo remained stable during the reporting period. The focus in the district was on the recently concluded elections. Election monitoring body PAF-FREL reported a large number of election violations, including several incidents in which shots were fired, and two deaths. However, a record 1.4 million voters had not gone to the polls.

The issue of garbage collection is a major problem faced by the district, with uncollected garbage piling up on roadsides, creating unsanitary conditions. The district has no demarcated area for garbage disposal and often temporary sites are used, which soon spiral out of control as garbage mountains form.

Intermittent search operations continue in the district. The Sinhala New Year season saw a noticeable reduction in the number of shoppers as people cut down spending

in view of the spiralling cost of living. Meanwhile, commuters were greatly inconvenienced due to the CTB strike during the New Year season.

Meanwhile, the incidence of dengue in the district has risen dramatically.

ACTORS

The Government and political parties contesting in the elections and the Armed Forces can be considered the main actors.

DYNAMICS

The recently concluded election was the main incident affecting the dynamics of the district, as contestants plied the city with propaganda and entertainment designed to garner votes.

The visit by foreign diplomats regarding the ongoing war caused considerable debate in the district, as some parliamentarians protested against international intervention in issues of a national nature. However the

visiting diplomats issued clear statements to the effect that their concern lay with the civilians in the No Fire Zone and the status of the displaced population.

On the economic front, the impact of the global economic crisis is making itself ever more present in the country, with the closure of several garment factories and small scale industries, resulting in unemployment.

STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS

The authorities need to launch a programme to educate the people on the fatal nature of the dengue disease in order to mobilise them to be more proactive in taking preventive measures.

The Health Ministry also needs to mobilise more personnel and devote adequate funds to see that the disease is combated effectively.

JAFFNA

STRUCTURES

While the security situation in Jaffna is relatively stable, intensive cordon and search operations are regularly carried out due the confrontations in Mullaitivu. As in the other districts, however, paramilitary activity continues, with random killings and abductions.

Following the opening of the A9 road for the transport of essential items and other market produce from Colombo to Jaffna, the prices of food and agricultural items in the district have reduced. Agricultural produce is also sent from Jaffna to Colombo, thus increasing trade and market opportunity in Jaffna.

A majority of the population has relatives in Killinochchi and Mullaitivu, and are anxious and concerned regarding events in those areas.

Meanwhile the Government announcement

that it plans to hold local authority elections in the Northern Province within two months has been met by mixed reactions from the district. While a section of the population is sceptical that the Government can indeed achieve this goal so speedily, there is also a recognized need for the Government to ensure the protection of candidates and civilians in the area in the event of such an election.

ACTORS

The Government, the Armed Forces, NGOs and traders can be considered the main actors.

DYNAMICS

The people are now impatiently awaiting a speedy end to the almost three decade war, and hope for a long forgotten freedom and peace to be restored to the country's North as speedily as possible.

The opening of the A9 road and the resul-

tant trade activity, as well as the rebuilding of a railway track from Vavuniya has raised hopes among the people that the situation is indeed on the mend and that they will achieve a higher quality of life that the one they have been subjected to for almost three decades.

STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS

The "Uthuru Wasanthaya" programme which focuses on rebuilding the North should be given as much momentum as possible, and focus on enhancing the standards of living of the people by introducing income generation options as well as initiating innovative peace building programmes.

The Jaffna IDPs also need to be provided for, in terms of basic healthcare, nutrition and access to basic facilities.

MANNAR

STRUCTURES

The Mannar Hospital has so far received more than 1,600 Vanni patients from Vavuniya, Trincomalee, and Pullmottai. It is encouraging to note that NGOs, religious institution and public organizations are contributing in a large measure to the relief effort and to ease the burden on the hospital staff. Organisations aid in meal preparation, laundry, maintenance of premises, etc.

The DPDHS has reported that it has already

exhausted its budget allocation for 2009, and requested that the discharged patients be sent to camps for rehabilitation.

Plans for bring 5000 IDP families to Mannar are currently underway, and two schools are been earmarked to house these families. Plans are also underway to clean up a village which had become uninhabitable due to the growth of shrub jungle in and around the houses, in order to resettle yet more IDPs.

Civilian movement is restricted at the Medawachiya check point, with large numbers of civilians being refused access past the check point. Several civilians are reportedly unhappy that there seems to be discrimination in granting access beyond the check point as it is mostly Tamils who are refused access, while large numbers of Sinhalese and Muslims are being allowed through. Many Catholics were also disappointed at their inability to attend the Madhu Church festivities, due to the refusal of permission by the Sri Lank Army. Mean-

while, 19 IDPs have reportedly been granted asylum in India.

Paramilitary activities continue in the district, with five abductions and one death reported.

Plans are underway to shelter 100 of the elders released from camps in elders homes run by the Catholic Church.

ACTORS

The Ministry of Rehabilitation, Government authorities, the Armed Forces, humanitarian and relief organizations, the Catholic Church and the IDP population can be considered the main actors.

DYNAMICS

Large scale public volunteerism, spurred mainly by the requests of the Catholic Church has resulted in considerably lightening the burden on the Mannar Hospital in terms of auxiliary facilities such as the provision of meals, laundry facilities etc.

The refusal of permission to large numbers of Tamil civilians has resulted in some unrest among the population, particularly

those unable to attend to urgent personal matters. Clear instructions given by the GA Mannar regarding the reasons for which travel will be permitted, along with proof of the necessity for travel, could resolve this problem to some degree.

Paramilitary activity is also creating a great degree of tension in the district, and resulting in most people not venturing outside their homes for all but the most urgent of tasks.

STRATEGIC AND OPTIONS

The Government needs to formulate guidelines which would provide a clear outline for granting permission to civilians to pass the Medawachiya check point, as in the absence of any such guidelines the Tamils population is bound to feel that their fundamental rights are being breached.

The police needs to implement stricter measures to deal with paramilitary activity, in order to maintain law and order in the district.

Enabling more NGOs to work within the district could lead to better conditions for IDPs

and a reduction of the burden on the Government. For example, while the WFP is providing basic food items such as rice, flour and pulses, other organizations could provide supplementary food items such as vegetables and protein, as well as milk food, clothes, feminine items and other essentials.

Employment generation also needs to be given urgent attention, as a large number of the IDP population are able to work, and if provided with temporary identification could perform tasks such as paddy harvesting, fishing, etc., providing the dual benefit of easing the Government burden as well as decreasing unrest caused by the unemployed youth within the camps.

TRINCOMALEE

STRUCTURES

The security situation in Trincomalee is relatively stable compared to the other district in the eastern province. Security in the city was strengthened during the influx of IDPs from the Wannai, while checking of vehicles and civilians traffic has also become more stringent. All passengers are required to register themselves and record their identity card numbers at checkpoints on the Trincomalee Colombo road. Some degree of tension remains however due to ongoing paramilitary activity.

Families living in Trincomalee have received strict instructions by the police to avoid accommodating anybody not included in the family card. If such accommodation is to be given, the person's details have to be recorded in the family card and endorsed by the respective police station in the area. Similarly, those travelling out of Trincomalee have to carry their family card at all times, as civilians found without these documents are likely to face difficulties at security checkpoints.

Meanwhile, a direct train service from Trincomalee to Batticaloa has begun. The Indian Government gifted a rail bus to the Eastern Provincial Council.

Several casualties from Mullaitivu were treated at the Pulmodai Hospital. The Government is also making arrangements to provide relief for the influx of IDPs and make arrangements for their temporary settlement.

The district is still reeling from the killing of six year old Varsha Jude Reggi and public anger at the impunity with which the brutal murder was carried out, is still high. This highlights the incidence of paramilitary activity in the district, and the need for strict measures to curb such activity. Five people have been killed during the month, and the gunmen are yet to be identified.

ACTORS

Government authorities, the Armed Forces, NGOs, paramilitary groups and the IDP population are the main actors in the cur-

rent context.

DYNAMICS

In view of ongoing paramilitary activity in the district, the business community is living under a great degree of tension, resulting in little investment and business development in the district, which has also resulted in a marginal increase in unemployment. The banking institutions operating in the district has also seen a reduction in business.

STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS

The authorities need to ensure that strict action is taken to curb paramilitary activity, as well as deal sternly with any such activists who are apprehended.

The needs of the newly increased IDP population need to be assessed and their basic needs catered to if a humanitarian crisis is to be averted.

VAVUNIYA

STRUCTURES

Following the Sri Lanka Army push to liberate civilians trapped within the No Fire Zone, more than an estimated 100,000 IDPs managed to escape the No Fire Zone and arrangements are reportedly currently underway to bring the IDPs to Vavuniya and

Mannar.

The large influx has however placed a greater burden on the Government in terms of providing basic facilities and services for the IDPs. A majority of the IDPs reportedly suffer from depression and anxiety, due to the hardships they have had to endure in the recent past. While the action to liberate

these IDPs has been under consideration for some time, it would appear that due consideration has not been given to the logistics of accommodating and providing for these IDPs following their liberation.

Meanwhile, humanitarian and relief organizations in the area are currently involved in

providing shelter for the IDPs, providing temporary educational facilities for the over 13,000 displaced students, and providing basic facilities such as water, telecommunications, banks, co-operative stores, post offices and play areas for the children, as well as providing counselling services for the traumatized IDPs.

Meanwhile, some of the requests reportedly made by the IDPs to the authorities are that they be issued with temporary identification in order to enable them to leave the cramped conditions of the camps at least for a short while. They have also requested that their relatives be allowed to visit them and provide them with assistance, and that those in need of health services be allowed access to better medical services outside the camps.

The murder of a well known doctor resulted in a hospital strike as well as the temporary closure of shops in the town in protest of

the incident.

ACTORS

The Ministry of Rehabilitation, the Armed Forces, humanitarian and relief organizations, and the IDP population can be considered the main actors in the current context.

DYNAMICS

As the IDP population saw a massive influx tensions within the already congested camps rose. Adult men are languishing within the camps with no access to employment opportunities and no relief from boredom and the cramped conditions within the camps. This has led to murmurings of discontent and if this discontent is not managed and the IDPs not provided with some degree of relief from their living conditions, conditions within the camp could soon become volatile.

As a counter measure, the authorities agreed to allow a few elders to leave the

camps, while relief organizations provided some basic facilities such as telecommunications and post offices. A number of youth have also been appointed as camp officers, a measure it is hoped will help maintain law and order to some degree.

STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS

The Government should also make plans to begin a mass scale clearing of land mines in newly liberated areas in Western Mannar, Northern Vavuniya, etc., as this would pave the way for the earliest possible resettlement of the displaced population.

The provision of temporary identification facilities also has to be expedited, especially for students sitting for national exams and for youth seeking employment.

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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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