

# RAPID CONTEXT ASSESSMENT



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## INDICATOR REFERENCES

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

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



In politics the UNP averted a further split by retaining Ranil Wickremasinghe as its leader. The JVP is in disarray. The ten-party ruling coalition of UPFA is politically riding high on the war and is on track to win the Western Provincial Council elections on April 25<sup>th</sup>.

In early March the military captured the strategically important town Puthukkudiyiruppu. Now the LTTE holds a mere 27 sq km, or two tenths of one percent of the 15,600 sq km (24% of Sri Lanka's land area) that they held a few years ago.

The suicide bombing this month in Akuresa in the southern province that killed 11 people and injured many more shows that terrorists can still infiltrate the south. Abductions, arrests, disappearances and killings mostly in the north and east and some in Colombo continued with killings in Batticaloa showing an increase over the preceding month.

The attempt to undermine the private media continued with the arrest of the editor of Sudoroli N. Vidyadaran and the abduction of

a former chairman of the state television company who was released after a few hours.

The likely end of the war raises the question of the nature of the post-conflict society that we wish to see in the country. One perspective sees the success of the government's war effort as a positive force that has the broad support of the people and brings the government, people and the armed forces closer together. Another perspective is less optimistic and fears that the war victory may undermine democracy, allow the armed forces to interfere in politics, and cause further ethnic polarization.

The international community focused on the IDPs – estimates vary from 50,000 to 200,000 – and the humanitarian crisis in the north. UN envoy John Holmes after visiting Sri Lanka released \$10m to assist IDPs and appealed to both sides to ensure the safety of civilians. The call from the international community to at least have a pause in fighting to get the IDPs out of the war zone has so far not been heeded. UN agencies, ICRC and some NGOs got greater access to IDP camps in the north and India set up a field hospital for IDPs. The JVP supports the war. The UNP which the main opposition party has an obligation to take a position, especially on the IDPs

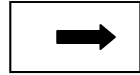
but remains more or less silent.

On the economic front inflation moderated further in March continuing the trend that began in the third quarter of 2008. Business confidence has improved a little in the belief that the war will soon come to an end. The fiscal situation is tight. The government has failed to raise \$350m for the Sapugaskanda oil refinery expansion and Rs15b needed to correct pension anomalies. Government will ask the legislature to increase the upper limit on treasury bills from the current Rs600b to Rs 750b signalling its readiness to "print" money to cover the budget deficit.

Tourism and garments exports are suffering from the recession. Tea prices are holding but up but production is down owing to the prolonged drought. In both garments and tea Sri Lanka is losing its competitive edge. The government is offering concessions to exporters but the policy is not comprehensive and consistent. The Government has asked for \$1.9b loan from IMF to tide over difficulties.

In environment the long draught has reduced crop yields and the water levels in the hydropower reservoirs. The rains that came in the middle of the month helped alleviate the situation.

## NATIONAL ANALYSIS - 27.02.2009 TO 26.03.2009



### POLITICAL CONTEXT

The much waited fall of the single largest (42-seats sans the Speaker) and oldest political party in parliament – the United National Party (UNP) – did not take place after all. Sanity prevailed and this is an important ingredient if the UNP is to make some dent in the otherwise corrupt political administration of the time.

It is all now up to the voter but his choices are tough. The poor man who forms the majority is not bothered who comes in. They (political parties) are all the same, they quip. Those joining the middle class club and who are already in it are the ones that suffer the most. So it is they who can make the difference. Is it going to be continuing with the war or bringing down the Cost of Living (CoL), which any government will find difficult to do since Sri Lanka relies a lot on

imports of essential commodities.

Economically Sri Lanka is in a bad situation. Will the Rupee be re-floated to Rs.132? What about the foreign exchange reserve which stands at sufficient funds available for another 1.3 months as relieved by the Central Bank of Sri Lanka.

The JVP that was fast becoming the third force has dropped back and out of the race since their party is split on issues and lacks focus.

With all this who stands to gain the “Sandanaya” or known as the United People’s Freedom Alliance (UPFA) with more than 10 political parties and cross-over parliamentarians and represented by the betel symbol. Some of the political parties

affiliated to the “Sandanaya” are the SLFP, PA, MEP, NSSP, SLMC break away - Athaulah Faction, CPSL, NFF, CWC, UPPF, two UNP alternate Groups one led by Dr. Sarath Amunugama and the other led by Karu Jayasuriya who has done a 360 degree turn.

With all the uncertainty around all eyes are directed at the Western Provincial Council Elections on April 25. The Western Province is the largest in population of all the nine Provinces and represents three major districts that of Colombo, Gampaha and Kalutara. This election has become the most important since it will become the deciding factor whether to finish the war or jump-start the economy and arrest the slide.

### GOVERNANCE



International attention that only a few weeks ago was on the spectacular advances of the Sri Lankan military has now turned almost completely to the humanitarian crisis. The standard prescription to the crisis of trapped civilians that is being received from abroad is for there to be a humanitarian ceasefire accompanied by an evacuation of civilians. In addition there are supplementary calls for the non utilization of heavy weaponry in the safe zones declared by the government that could lead to civilian casualties.

The LTTE have been accused of firing at the government troops from inside these safe zones or adjacent to them, and the Sri Lankan military has been accused of firing into the safe zones. These denunciations made by a range of international actors including the UN’s Human Rights Commissioner have included accusations of breaches of international law that could amount to war crimes.

The relative silence of the main opposition

political party which ought to be having a plan of its own to address the situation if it is called upon to govern the country in the future is a disturbing feature of the present crisis. While the opposition JVP is supportive of the war, the mainstream UNP is taking an ambivalent stance and not putting across its own ideas as to what needs to be done to take the ship of state to safe shores. They appear to be leaving the government to find the solution to the problems it finds itself in. The approach seems to be a wait-and-see one.

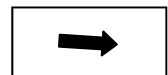
There are reports also that the UNP itself is divided, both on the issue of its own leadership and on the issue of the war, with a section wishing to support the government in its war effort as a patriotic duty. By the end of the month the tussle for leadership seems to have ended which provides the main opposition party to rethink its stand on the war.

Those who can only contribute to keep the government ensnared in a violent course of

action that is being internationally described as crimes against humanity do not merit taking over the leadership of the opposition. On the contrary, the opposition needs to give the government advice and support necessary to save Sri Lankan lives being lost in the course of the war and ease the international pressures on it. The opposition also needs to reach out to the people who are in welfare camps and who are in the overflowing hospitals as victims of the war.

At a time when Tamil citizens run the risk of being accused of being supporters of the LTTE if they speak against the war or about the victims of the war, it is necessary that the mainstream opposition takes up the cause of caring for and protecting the Tamil people and to be seen to be doing so. Those who seek to lead the opposition must also be able to give forthright public and national leadership to the protection of civilian life.

### SECURITY



The three-year-long military operation to eradicate terrorism from this beautiful island nation has reached its last phase with the capture of the Iranapalai junction, located north of Puthukkudiyiruppu. This has confined the terrorists to 26.5 square kilometres, including the No Fire Zone. As stated in D.B.S Jeyaraj’s newspaper column, the LTTE formerly controlled an area of about 15,600 [sq.km](#) of territory in the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka.

Puthukkudiyiruppu town, the last strategic town and the last town held by the LTTE was captured on March 3rd by troops of the 58<sup>th</sup> and 53<sup>rd</sup> divisions. During this period Government troops were able to capture nearly 37 square kilometres of land area controlled by the LTTE. The Infantry of the 20 Gajaba Regiment, 7 Sri Lanka Sinha Regiment and 11 Sri Lanka Light Infantry of 581 Brigade, captured Iranapalai junction and the 58<sup>th</sup> division

has taken full control of the road leading to Puthumatalan, two kilometres away from the safe zone. Heavy fighting was reported during the last week of March between the LTTE and the SL Army as Government troops moved towards the “No Fire Zone” from two directions. Task force 8 is advancing from the northern boundary of the Nanthikadal lagoon while the 53<sup>rd</sup> division is advancing parallel to the A-35 road from Puthukkudiyiruppu.



Matara Akurassa.

- After the Akurassa blast 141 Tamil people were arrested in Matara District. Its not revealed if they are yet being released.
- Former Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation chairman, Dr. Dammika Ganganath Disanayake, had been abducted from his residence and he was returned home next day.
- A CTB bus travelling from Valaichchenai to Kalmunai was set on fire by unidentified gunmen.
- Abducted lady teacher was released in front of her home in Wellawatte.
- A 6 year old child was abducted and killed in Trincomalee.
- 64 Elders were sent with relatives from internment camps in Vavuniya
- 02 Mothers and 03 Children were missing in Mannar hospital
- "CARE" aid worker killed in shell attack

- Girl dies from Rubella Vaccination. 26 Students were admitted in Hospital in Matara.
- 2 TMVP members were shot dead in Ampara, Batticaloa districts.

#### Arrests & Abductions

During the reported period 275 suspects were arrested in search operations on suspicion, lack of proper identification papers or not having a valid reason to be at given location. According to the sources highest numbers of suspect arrested were in Matara (141) this could be as a result to the explosion in Akurassa. 39 people who failed to prove their identities or justify their presence in the Wellawatta area were arrested in a joint police and army search operation.

During this period the many abducted victims, were returned home. 04 of the 05 people abducted, were re-

turned home in the Colombo District. 02 were returned in Vavuniya and one in Puttalam. Meanwhile, in Mannar two Mothers and three children went missing from the Mannar Hospital.

#### Killings & Injuries

According to Tamil newspapers 106 people have been killed and 380 people were injured in Mullaitivu District due to Shelling and Shooting. 15 People were Killed and 40 were injured due to suicide attack in Akurassa, 16 Civilians killed and 10 severely injured in Karametiya village in Inginiyagala resulting from the attack by a group of suspected LTTE cadres.

In Batticaloa District Violations have increased Compare with the previous time period. 10 people were shot dead in Batticaloa District.

(Further info and statistics could be obtained from [hrac1@cha.lk](mailto:hrac1@cha.lk))

## ECONOMIC CONTEXT



The good economic news in March was the drop in the annualized rate of inflation to 5.3% from 7.6% in the preceding month. The Financial Times (FT) of London announced that two Sri Lankan banks, Hatton National and DFCC, were among 22 banks worldwide that have entered the FT/IFC Sustainable Banking Competition 2009 for the top award of "Bank of the Year." This is a compliment to Sri Lankan banking.

The LMD-Nielsen Business Confidence Index (BCI) registered a two-year high of 122 in February compared to 96 in January, perhaps because the end to the protracted ethnic war appears to be in sight. But this optimism may not last long.

The fiscal situation tightened in March. The government admitted that it did not have the Rs 15b needed to correct pension anomalies of retired state employees. The Sapugaskanda oil refinery expansion project to be funded with a loan of over \$1.0b from Iran is in jeopardy because Sri Lanka has failed to raise \$350m for the project. However Mihin Air got another Rs 400m from the Treasury to settle a bank loan.

The government is to seek parliamentary authorization to raise the limit on treasury bills from the existing Rs 600 billion to Rs 750 billion.

Tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka declined by 25.5% in January-February 2009 compared to the same two months in 2008.

Problems in Sri Lanka's main exports are only partly caused by the global recession. A survey of the garment industry in seven provinces revealed that 75 factories had closed down between mid 2005 and early 2009. The number of steady garment buyers operating in Sri Lanka has dropped from about 50 in 2005 to about 30 today. The global recession apart, the main reasons include the higher cost of production, bad security situation and the over-valued rupee.

Tea prices are strong on account of a shortfall in global supply caused by drought in South India, Kenya and Sri Lanka. But the gain from higher price is offset by lower production. Moreover, labour productivity in the Sri Lanka tea industry is about two-thirds that of India and only about 55% of that of Kenya. As a result of these unfavourable conditions Sri Lankan tea has lost market share in Egypt, Pakistan, UK and Afghanistan mainly to Kenya. The over-valued rupee makes the our tea even less competitive.

The government's attempt to revive the negotiation of the comprehensive economic partnership agreement (CEPA) with

India to replace the existing free trade agreement has run into opposition from the local business community that alleges that India uses non-tariff barriers against Sri Lankan exports.

The government repealed the import tax on liquid petroleum gas (LPG) that it imposed last December to provide relief to industrial users such as ceramics exporters.

The government has not officially responded to the request of the Employers Federation to permit employers whose export orders have shrunk to curtail the work week and to lay off workers temporarily. However, informally many employers are doing that to survive the recession.

Sri Lanka raised \$185m from a two year dollar denominated bond at a premium interest rate to pay off a \$215m bond that matured in mid March..

By late March the net foreign reserves held by the Central Bank were down to an unsustainable \$900m. This compelled the government to request the IMF for a stand-by loan of \$1.9 billion. This loan will come with conditions attached including a depreciation of the rupee, a freeze on hiring for government jobs, and a reduction in the budget deficit which are sensible steps that should be taken even without the IMF.

## ENVIRONMENT



The long drought period that extended through February and into the beginning of March had wide-ranging negative effects the agricultural sector with many farmers losing the majority if not all of their crops. Areas affected include Kataragama and

Anuradhapura in the dry zone as well as the entire hill country where tea production has dropped by a third as a result. It is expected that the recent wetter weather will allow a recovery.

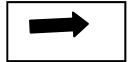
However, despite the onset of rains, reservoir levels are still perilously low with both the Maskeliya and Victoria reservoirs dropping to the point that the old Maskeliya and Teldeniya towns which were submerged during the construction of the reservoirs,

have re-surfaced. However in the North there has been extensive flooding in the early part of March due to heavy rains on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> with IDPs in the "safe zone" badly affected. Many families were living on what amounts to small islands covered by tarpaulin, surrounded by water. The onset of rains means an increase in thunder and lightning and the associated dangers of lightning strikes. Already there has been a report of tea pluckers being hit by lightning in March, resulting in at least two deaths. A new solution was proposed for the disposal of large amounts of solid waste accu-

mulating on municipal lands. The Minister of Environment and Natural Resources (MENR) has recently received cabinet approval for the MENR to take over municipal lands where garbage is being dumped if the municipalities do not clean up the lands themselves. The MENR will then implement a recycling program to dispose of as much of this waste as possible. Also related to waste management, cabinet passed an environmental levy on mobile phones in early March, arguing that an estimated 16 million hand phone batteries are discarded every year in Sri Lanka.

The large numbers of IDPs in the Wannai area are requiring shelter. As a result large expanses of forest land have been cleared to erect tents and temporary shelters. The indiscriminate clearing has resulted in camps being completely exposed to the elements and thus more prone to both heat and flooding. The removal of shade trees and the compaction of soil resulting from the movement of heavy machinery have compromised the environmental protection of both the region and the people.

## CIVIL SOCIETY & MEDIA SPACE



"No doubt the war victories have immediately strengthened the Government and the state in an unprecedented way, whilst weakening the oppositional forces. The government and the state could well use this situation to adopt an authoritarian rule with an iron fist disregarding the needs of Democracy and the Rule of Law....." An extract from a pamphlet titled WHY A PEOPLES 'MOVEMENT FOR DEMOCRACY' under the signature of Political Activist and Presidential Advisor Mr. Vasudeva Nanayakkara distributed at a Preliminary Discussion held on 12<sup>th</sup> March at the Sri Lanka Foundation Institute to form a Peoples Movement for Democracy. It was a brave attempt by a few well meaning academics and other activists which soon turned out to be a forum for many honest, well intentioned citizens of all most all communities to revisit past follies and look at an uncertain future through their highly individualistic prisms which no doubt allowed them to see the colours of a distant rain bow as they wished. What it did demonstrate was how the dividends of a decisive victory over the LTTE has further encouraged ethnic polarisation, for they could only agree that the end result still remains a conundrum that defies their com-

prehension. Implicit in Mr. Vasudeva Nanayakkara's statement is the paradox that civil society is yet to resolve. What is the ultimate object of defeating Terrorism? Is it an exercise in creating a society free of violence and a firm commitment to the rule of law?. Or was it a political exercise to appease the majority of our people who were just plain tired of violence and uncertainty of what the future beheld.? If it is the latter, Civil Society will be compelled to be far more pro active in arresting the trend of ethnic/communal polarisation.

However Dr. Dayan Jayatilake has analysed what Mr. Nanayakkara describes as the unprecedented strengthening of the government and the consequent weakening of the oppositional forces differently.

Dr. Jayatilake writes ".....*This morale itself is drawn from the supportive population base, whose active support for the war is manifested in popularity pools which range from a low of a 75% approval to a high of 83%-93%. Thus it is the people, chiefly but not exclusively the Sinhala people, who by their support and sacrifice have provided the foundation for the military*

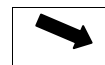
*success. What this reveals is an organic identity between the people, the armed forces and the political leadership; an identity between state and society, which is a historic rarity. For the first time we have a leadership that listened to the people on this central issue, that turned itself into an instrument of the people's will. This is the secret of the success of 2008 and one of the main features of this year."* \*

What Dr. Jayatileke describes as a HISTORIC RARITY is what seems to disturb Mr. Nanayakkara..

The media in the month of March has also focused on several issues in addition to its extensive and positive coverage of the war on Terrorism. The perilous state of the economy, the collapse of several financial institutions and the need for a disciplined public service did receive the attention of both the print and electronic media which seems to suggest that there is yet hope for a gradual easing of the self censorship they seem to practice.

\*ACHIVEMENT 2008, CHALLENGE 2009 by Dayan Jayatileke

## HUMANITARIAN AND DEVELOPMENT SPACE



### North

After the closure of the A9 Road in August 2006 due to shelling of the entry/exit points a food convoy of 22 lorries escorted by the security forces reached Jaffna via the A9 road on 10 March. for the 1<sup>st</sup> Time. On the convoy's return to Colombo, lorries brought back vegetables and dry fish from Jaffna.

As of 16 March, 3,539 persons from the Vanni had arrived in Jaffna. Vanni IDPs are accommodated in six IDP sites (Kopay Teachers' Training College (463 IDPs), Old Court House Jaffna (113 IDPs) and Mirusuvil RCTMS Church (1,313 IDPs), Kodikamam GTMS School (706 IDPs), Kaithady Hindu Children Home (184 IDPs) and Kaithady University Hostel (760 IDPs).. UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP and ICRC have access to the camps. Some NGOs have been

granted access to distribute relief items To accommodate new influx authorities have identified 2 new locations and also the existing sites are being extended.

With the increasing casualties from the conflict an emergency Medical hospital to assist the injured being evacuated from Mullaativu was set up in Pullmodai. As the no of injured have increased and the Hospitals in Trincomalee and Vavuniya are unable to cope. India with the concurrence of the SL government has set up the hospital with specialists, support medical staff and facilities to meet the requirements. As at 29 March a total of 177 patients are in GH Trincomalee and 1210 are in hospitals in other areas. Presently at the Field hospital in Pullmodai 37 patients are being treated with the balance transferred to Base Hospital Padaviya and Pulmodai.

With the increasing conflict situation and areas under LTTE shrinking considerably, there has been a steady stream of people coming out of the conflict zone reaching Government controlled areas by boat or land. As at 22 March the total no of IDPs in Vavuniya 13,479 families comprising of 41,118 persons. They are housed in 13 welfare centres and 2 relief villages in Vavuniya. There has been allowance given for more NGOs to access sites provided a letter of intent is signed with the Ministry of resettlement.

The supply of water would be issue at the Manik Farm welfare village as ground water sources are inadequate. An option is to have a pipeline to the area, but due to the permanency of the solution it may not be supported by agencies. Another option will be to obtain water from Mahaweli River. As

a result , if cultivation is affected, compensation will have to be paid to the farmers. UNDP Mine action reported due to the Intervention of high officials in government advisor there has been a breakthrough in the mine clearing in Musali/ Silavathurai . Task dossiers have been done for 15 villages for surveys and mine Removal . There are additional areas surrounding Madhu, Rice bowl and 25 m on either side of A 32 Road. Manthai west needs clearance from MOD and in DS Division of Mannar 3 sites have also been identified. A total area of 37 tasks have been identified for de-mining in Mannar

#### East Trincomalee

Trincomalee IDPs 1,176 families 3,829 persons

In Trincomalee 147 families will be resettled at Pattalipuram and 120 tents have been

provided. Water has to be provided through deep well. UMCOR has been approached to construct tube wells. Regarding relocation, 150 houses are to be constructed by Iranian government. In Morawewa 25 applicants have sought assistance for resettlement facilities. They are to be verified from respective government bodies as to their actual status before any assistance is provided.

**Batticaloa** IDPs 2,110 families 8,001 persons  
**Ampara** IDPS 1,078 families 3,961 persons

In Batticaloa District 3 GN Divisions in Kiran DS Division, resettlement is pending security clearance. There were reports to the spread of communicable disease, particularly the 25 cases with scabies. PHI has been informed of this situation. Re union of families and special needs for vulnerable

groups are the pressing requirements in the district

#### General

The Government launched its national campaign Bring back the child in order to prevent Child recruitment by the LTTE . As past efforts have failed to get any agreement to release the child soldiers the fight to put an end to Child recruitment . As at December 2008, the total recruitment of those under 18 years of age by the LTTE was 6,288. Of these,3,809 were boys and 2,478 girls. These children have been taken forcibly depriving them of their family , school and community. They have also been deprived of their right to education and other facilities enjoyed by children across the country. They have lived in a climate of violence and suffering and need to be in an environment of peace and normalcy.

## EXTERNAL ACTORS

There is very little to differentiate from all the interventions on Sri Lanka other than on the words used. The passage below from a UN security Council briefing by Sir John Humes says it all!

*"Mr. President, I understand that there are continuing attempts via intermediaries to persuade the LTTE to let the civilians go and agree on a peaceful end to the fighting. I desperately hope these attempts will succeed very soon. I also urge the Government of Sri Lanka to hold back from any final military battle in order to allow time for the civilian population to get out safely, one way or another.*

*Mr. President, the Common Humanitarian*

*Action Plan, or CHAP, 2009 for Sri Lanka was launched on 18 February, for a total amount of USD155 million. In order to accelerate humanitarian response by UN agencies in partnership with NGOs, I have released USD 10 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund. The funds will be utilized for life-saving activities in the areas of protection, food, nutrition, health, shelter, water and sanitation, and emergency education. I appeal to the donor community to respond generously to the CHAP, in the light of the existing and future needs in this very worrying situation.*

*Mr. President, my visit to Sri Lanka was intended as a visible demonstration of the*

*international community's high level of concern about the humanitarian consequences of the continuing fighting. I trust that my pleas to all parties to do all they can to protect civilians and respect international humanitarian law will not fall on deaf ears. The continuing close attention of the international community will be a very important part of this, including scrutiny of the implementation of the assurances given by the Government. I urge again all those with any influence on the positions of the LTTE to use that influence now to persuade them to let the civilian population go. There is no time to lose. "*

## DISTRICT ANALYSIS

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

### AMPARA

#### STRUCTURES

Paramilitary activity seems to be on the rise once more in the Ampara district. Among the Security incidents in the areas of Igniyagala Kerimetiya, Uhana, Sorikalmunai, Samandurai and the surrounding villages have also increased tensions and fears in the district.

Incidents such as robberies, looting and abductions have also seen an increase and created tensions in the district. Meanwhile, a number of T56 guns were found in the Banrathuwa area, and a few Tamil youths have been arrested.

Tensions among the leadership of the TMVP have subsided with the party's President Karuna joining ranks with the SLFP. Following this move, the atmosphere in the district seems to be one of expectancy and hope that the Eastern Province will attract more

attention from the Government.

Inter-communal relations as well as the political atmosphere in the district have seen a noticeable improvement in the district recently. Development activity in the area is continuing steadily, especially in the area of highway and irrigation development, and is receiving active support from the people.

#### ACTORS

The Security Forces, Karuna, the Chief Minister of the Eastern Province, and local politicians can be considered the main actors in the current context.

#### DYNAMICS

Karuna's decision to join the SLFP has had an impact on the dynamics of the district. While his departure has led to an easing of tensions within the TMVP, it remains to be seen how effective a player he can remain

in the political development of the Eastern Province. While Karuna has promised that the maximum possible attention will be paid to the needs of the Eastern Province, it seems to be clear to many that the support of a number of other players, among them the security forces and other politicians, are also necessary for this promise to hold true.

#### STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS

The Government needs to concentrate on maintaining stability in the district and eliminating the paramilitary activity which has placed the district on a somewhat tense footing. Great attention also has to be paid to the equitable distribution of funds, jobs and other available resources among the different communities, in order to maintain the fragile peace in the district.

## BATTICALOA

### STRUCTURES

While a few instances of paramilitary activity, including confrontations between these groups and the security forces, have been reported during the month under consideration, the overall security situation in district has improved. The number of abductions and killings reported has also seen a decline.

The people of the district currently seem to be more absorbed by the political shifts in respect of the TMVP. The joining of the SLFP of the party's President Karuna and the subsequent take over of leadership of the TMVP by the Chief Minister of the Eastern Province is the source of much speculation within the district. A common expectation seems to be that with these changes, the Eastern Province will receive more at-

tention from the central government. Development activity has started in the district, and a few Hindu temples, residences and commercial establishments are seeing gradual renovations, as with the end of the war being reportedly near, confidence in imminent peace is increasing.

### ACTORS

The Chief Minister, former President of the TMVP Karuna, the Security Forces, paramilitary groups and NGO personnel can be considered the main actors.

### DYNAMICS

The joining of the SLFP by the former President of the TMVP, Karuna, is one of the pivotal issues affecting the dynamics of the district. The move has raised expectations among the people that the Eastern Prov-

ince will receive more attention in terms of aid and development.

### STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS

While the incidence of paramilitary activity has reduced in the recent past, the Government and the Security Forces need to concentrate on further reducing such activity and squashing these groups, as even isolated incidents of this nature can serve to raise fears in the district.

Local government authorities need to be given more freedom to exercise their authority, and sufficient funds to carry out proposed development activity needs to be diverted to the district. In addition, the relevant authorities need to work at improving inter communal relations in a bid to improve the overall atmosphere in the district.

## COLOMBO

### STRUCTURES

Colombo saw a relatively slow month, except for the isolated incident of the abduction and subsequent release of Professor Dhammika Dissanayake of former Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation (SLRC) Chairman which once again brought the forefront the recent attacks and threats on media organizations.

No security incidents were reported during the month, although the people of the district were still slightly tense following last month's aerial attacks by the LTTE, amid rumours that more would follow as the war waged on.

The dengue menace has once again reared its head in the district, with four deaths reported during the month.

The forthcoming Western Provincial Council

elections seem to have little impact on the district, as people show little enthusiasm, unlike in the past when any election would be the subject of much debate and speculation. Six JVP campaign offices were attacked by unidentified groups during the month, and the Government came under some criticism for these attacks.

Meanwhile, a special semi luxury shuttle bus service was introduced from Moratuwa to Colombo in order to reduce the traffic congestion within Colombo city limits.

### ACTORS

The Government, political parties and the media can be considered the main actors.

### DYNAMICS

The forthcoming election is probably the main event in the province at the time, although there is a marked lack of enthusi-

asm on the part of the voters. The people are also expectant that the war will come to an end soon as victory seems near according to media reports.

### STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS

Security Forces and civilians need to be constantly reminded of the need for vigilance and security, especially in crowded public places, as during a lull of relative peace security tends to be relatively relaxed, which could have disastrous consequences.

The Health Ministry also needs to be more proactive and effective in combating the dengue menace, by educating people as to how to avoid unwittingly providing the mosquito with breeding grounds, as well as conducting regular visits to vulnerable areas of the district.

## JAFFNA

### STRUCTURES

A large number of civilians have fled the LTTE controlled areas in Mullaitivu and arrived in Jaffna via sea routes. Almost 3000 civilians who have fled LTTE controlled areas are currently in camps in Jaffna, while yet more are expected in the days to come. The A9, Jaffna Kandy road was officially declared open by the Government after a period of two and a half years. The road will initially be used for the transport of goods between the North and the South. Initially six lorries carried essential items from Omanthai to Jaffna, and returned to Colombo with fish and agricultural produced from Jaffna. This was a high point for the people of Jaffna who can now look forward to a greater variety and quantity of essential items, as well as a larger market for their products in the South.

The Government has announced that from mid April onwards the road will be open for civilian traffic, and the people of Jaffna are looking forward to travelling out of the district with no undue restrictions. The Government is also in the process of establishing a fund to rebuild the rail track from Omanthai to Jaffna. If this is achieved it would greatly ease current restrictions on travel and make travelling out of Jaffna, especially for essential purposes much easier.

Currently, action is being taken to strengthen security in the district, by for example, re-establishing police stations in key areas of the recaptured areas in the North.

### ACTORS

The main actors in the current context are

the Government, the Security Forces, LTTE and IDPs. NGOs and the ICRC are also key players in terms of providing humanitarian relief to the IDPs and other affected people of the district.

### DYNAMICS

The recent improvements in terms of transportation to and access to other districts, with the opening of the A9 road are a source of much contentment for the people of the district, while the proposed rebuilding of the railway line between Omanthai and Jaffna has also raised expectations. The prices of essential items are also bound to reduce with the opening of the A9 road, and result in a greater variety and quantity of items in the district as well as provide a larger market in the South for the district's produce. The latter is also bound to have a great positive influence on the income gen-

erating capacity of the district, and lead to an overall improvement in the lives of the people.

### STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS

The Government needs to take measures that will ensure the safety of civilians fleeing the LTTE controlled areas in Mullaitivu. The Government along with humanitarian and

relief organizations also needs to ensure the welfare of the growing IDP population, providing them with shelter, food, medicine, clothes and other essential items.

While the opening of the A9 road has been greeted with great enthusiasm, it is important that measures are in place to ensure the security of civilians using this road for

transport.

Meanwhile, the relaxing of restrictions governing the movement and work of NGO personnel could also be looked into, as a means of enabling the NGOs to more efficiently carry out their duties.

## MANNAR

### STRUCTURES

A number of civilians injured due to shelling and aerial bombing in Trincomalee and Vavuniya were transferred to the Mannar hospital, keeping the health authorities working around the clock, with the help of the ICRC, Handicap International, Caritas, Sarvodaya and other humanitarian organisations. Many doctors and final year nursing students from the South are also currently working at the Mannar hospital. There is an urgent need for an ENT surgeon, as over 100 patients are currently awaiting such treatment.

A few incidents of abductions and an isolated shooting incident were reported during the month, but threatening phone calls demanding ransoms from businessmen reportedly continue. Intermittent security checks continue in the district. Meanwhile, 13 IDPs have reportedly sought asylum in India.

Paddy harvesting has begun, but due to the lack of purchasing points and stored in Mannar, almost 80% of the harvested paddy goes to Vavuniya and Anuradapura, and is later sold as rice at a higher price to Mannar consumers. A kilo of rice in the district currently averages around Rs. 75. Nearly 3000 fishermen in several districts were restricted

from fishing for five days, reportedly due to the sea transportation of staff and ammunition for the Sri Lanka Army troops.

The largely Hindu district was elated at being able to participate in the sacred Mahasivarathri festival, while the Mannar Bishop was granted permission to visit the IDP camps.

Restrictions on travel to the South are still in place, with many civilians being refused access past the Medawachchiya checkpoint. Meanwhile, for the last two weeks there has been a disruption of email, fax and mobile phone services in the district, while frequent disruptions in electricity supply due to heavy rains are also a common feature.

### ACTORS

Government authorities, the Security Forces, NGOs and the IDPs are the main actors in the district currently.

### DYNAMICS

The arrival of an increasing number of patients from the Wannai to Mannar is some cause for concern, as the Mannar hospital is already operating at full staff and space capacity and cannot conceivably accommodate many more patients.

### STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS

The Government as well as development agencies could work together to fund the construction of paddy stores and mills in Mannar, so that the paddy would not have to be transported out of the district, resulting in higher costs to farmers as well as consumers. In addition, the authorities could look into the feasibility of permitting more land in the southern part of Mannar to be cultivated. The construction of a high capacity 'cool room' to store fish could also be looked into so that more fish could be transported to the South.

The extension of train services to Chettikulam could also be explored, as it would facilitate the transport of goods more efficiently, at the same time lifting some restrictions on civilian transport.

Humanitarian organizations could also look into setting up medical facilities in a school or public building in order to provide post surgical care to patients. The blood bank in the Mannar and Murunkan hospitals also need to be strengthened.

If these organizations strengthen their operations in the district, the fitting of prosthetic limbs could also be increased.

## TRINCOMALEE

### STRUCTURES

The passenger craft Seruwillla-2 which was under repairs for almost a year has recommenced transporting passengers from Trincomalee to Muttur. Passengers are however unhappy about the dramatic price increase and have appealed to the authorities to lower the fares.

Civilians injured due to the war the in the Wannai continue to arrive in Trincomalee. The more serious cases are treated immediately while others are transported to hospitals in other districts.

As abductions and killings continue in the district, many families are undergoing immense mental trauma as well as financial woes as the victims are often the breadwinner of families. Hitting the headlines during the past few weeks was the kidnapping and brutal murder of a six year old girl for ransom. Five suspects were arrested in this

connection, and two of the suspects have died while in police custody.

### ACTORS

The Security Forces, Government authorities, NGOs and civilians injured by the war are the main actors in the current context.

### DYNAMICS

The abduction of six year old Varsha Jude Reggi shook and enraged the district for its sheer brutality, and has spread fear among parents and school authorities alike.

While the prompt action on the part of the police was lauded, it is clear that stricter security measures will have to be taken, especially since the alleged kidnappers were reportedly members of a political party.

Meanwhile, little is happening in terms of redress to victims of human rights violations, mainly due to a lack of funds as well

as the now limited presence of NGOs dealing with such matters.

### STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS

Paramilitary activity in the district needs to be squashed as soon as possible, as the brutality of the acts seems to be increasing as demonstrated by the abduction and subsequent murder of six year old Varsha. Parents, especially those employed abroad or running businesses are worried about their children, and it is clear that stricter security measures will have to be enforced. The authorities also need to pay heed to the requests of alleged victims of human rights violations, and provide them with a form of redress, as their numbers seem to be ever increasing.

Meanwhile, families which have lost their breadwinners either due to the war or random abductions and killings need to be provided with some sort of sustainable livelihood support.

## VAVUNIYA

### STRUCTURES

Vavuniya town saw one of its busiest times ever, with the arrival of 39000 Wannu IDPs, including 1750 patients needing further treatment, from the Trincomalee hospital. Following the influx of IDPs, came a large number of civilians hoping to find their relations. NGO, Security Forces and media personnel, as well as politicians, representatives of foreign and religious organizations descended upon the town following the massive influx of IDPs.

The Wannu IDPs are currently housed in 14 IDP camps, and have provided with the bare minimum in terms of shelter, food, water and sanitation. Facilities will have to be improved however if a complete breakdown of the system is to be prevented, due to sheer overcrowding and lack of resources. The potential for diseases to spread fast among the camps is high due to overcrowded and unsanitary conditions. The Government is planning to construct an addition 24000 temporary shelters at the Chettikulam Manik Camp to house these extra numbers.

While a total of 7500 children have access to educational facilities in temporary schools set up within the camps, more than 25,000 children from the Vavuniya district have lost access to education as their schools have been taken over to shelter the growing IDP population. The Education Department is reportedly making arrangements to temporarily house these schools at churches, temples and other public buildings, but the facilities provided still fall short

of the required basics.

The Government has granted permission for those above 60 years in the IDP camps to stay with relations outside the camps. With approximately 1900 people falling into that age category residing in camps, the Government Agent has received 650 applications for these elders to leave the camps, while permission has been granted to a total of 74 elders so far.

Humanitarian agencies are also making arrangements to assist the mentally and physically disabled persons in the camps, in terms of counselling and providing prosthetic fittings, wheel chairs, etc. Arrangements are also being made to provide adequate care to some 750 pregnant mothers in the camps. Meanwhile, the Mannar Bishop visited these camps recently and plans are underway to open chapels and Hindu temples inside the camps.

The opening of the A9 road and the subsequent improvement in the transport of goods to and from Jaffna and the increase availability of varied products has been encouraging to the people.

### ACTORS

Local government authorities, the Security Forces, IDPs and NGOs are currently the main actors in the district.

### DYNAMICS

The massive influx of IDPs into the district has greatly affected the dynamics of the district, due mainly to the immense strain placed on the State, humanitarian and

relief organizations and the available resources in the district. The recent rains brought a lot of hardship to the IDPs, as the land and their shelters became waterlogged, toilets overflowed, and diseases spread rampantly.

The disruption in schooling to over 25000 children in the district has created a lot of tension among parents, as the duration of the closure of schools cannot be predicted, and is likely to be lengthy in the face of no immediate relocation plans to house the IDPs currently temporarily residing in ten schools in the district.

### STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS

More IDP camps have to be constructed in order to ensure there is adequate shelter for the IDPs as well as ensure that there is no disruption to education and commerce by taking over educational and commercial buildings to house the IDPs. The Government could work together with a number of donor agencies in order to achieve this. It is also important to construct shelters that are in accordance with the prevailing climatic conditions rather than those with tin and tarpaulin roofs which make the heat unbearable.

It is also necessary to begin issuing the IDPs with some form of temporary identification, enabling more efficient administration and resource utilization. The police needs to take a more active role with regard to stopping paramilitary activity in order to allow the people of the district to live peacefully and without fear.

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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](mailto:feedback@cha.lk)

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