

RAPID CONTEXT ASSESSMENT



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

National Analysis

Political Context	2
Governance	2
Human Rights	2
Human Security	3
Civil Society & Media Space	4
Economic context	4
Humanitarian & Development	5
Environment	5

District Analysis

Ampara	6
Batticaloa	6
Colombo	6
Jaffna	6
Mannar	7
Trincomalee	7
Vavuniya	7

TREND ANALYSIS GRID

Political context	→
Governance	↓
Human Rights	→
Human Security	→
Civil Society & Media Space	↘
Economic context	→
Human & development space	↓
Environment	→

INDICATOR REFERENCES

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



Source:Asiatribune

The parliamentary elections due April 8th preoccupied the country in March. It is a foregone conclusion that the governing UPFA would win the elections and form the next government. The only issue in doubt is the margin of victory. The government is grossly misusing state resources for its campaign. The opposition is demoralised. The highlight of the campaign is the intra-party fighting for seats, especially among UPFA contestants.

Fundamental rights petitions have been filed alleging that the government has failed to provide reasonable facilities to some voters in the north and east to exercise their franchise. Similarly a petition has been filed accusing the governing party of misusing state resources for elections. The failure of the government to adhere to norms of good governance and human rights has created a confrontation between itself and the international community. The government is strongly opposing a UN proposal to set up an international committee to advise the Secretary General on the country's human rights situation.

The end of the war improved human security in general. But some

sections of the community remain highly vulnerable.

Hopefully after the election more attention would be paid to these urgent issues at least for the sake of equity. The police continue to act with utter impunity. Criminality that affects the most vulnerable, the high frequency of rape is a good example, goes on unabated.

Human rights violations are best exemplified by the plight of journalists in the country.

On the 22nd of March a band of hooligans arriving in a bus attacked the head office of the MTV, one of the country's leading Television networks. The Government seems to be burdened with an insurmountable distrust of civil society. It is the responsibility of Civil Society as well as the media to persuade the government that Freedom and Public Security are not irreconcilable. Both civil society and Media are in crisis. Civil Society has to protect citizens' freedom not only in a political context but also in terms of mobilizing support for socially proactive initiatives. The Media has to rediscover its integrity.

There were no surprises on the economic front in March. The operative term in economic decision making for the month was "postponed until after the election." However, what could not wait for after the election was the need for funds to meet government fiscal obligations. The 2009 budget was almost totally off target. The Treasury announced that the 2009

budget deficit (excluding grants) was a whopping 10.2% of GDP that was way above the originally estimated 7.0%.

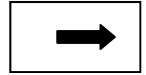
The government that is desperate for funds issued Sri Lanka Development Bonds (SLDBs) worth \$100m in early March. The government won't find it easy to present the next budget. The donors will demand fiscal discipline and stop the financial bleeding that occurs in state corporations such as the Ceylon Electricity Board and the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation. The government, on the other hand, is making extravagant promises to the electorate to please the voters. Cutting the fiscal deficit is going to be a very unpleasant task for the next finance minister, who in Sri Lanka happens to be the President himself.

Rain arrived in many parts of the island to break the long drought that had kept the country in its grip since January. However very dry conditions remain in many areas including the central hills where fires, many deliberately lit to clear underbrush, have ravaged hillsides and forest patches.

A special task force was set up by the Ministry of Healthcare and Nutrition to once again look into the rising dengue crisis across the island. The controversial reopening and reconstruction of the old Mannar road which runs through the Wilpattu National Park has been in the media. Many concerned environmental groups want the road shut down to save the Park.

NATIONAL ANALYSIS - 25/2/2010 TO 26/3/2010

POLITICAL CONTEXT



April 08 is the red letter date for the seventh Parliamentary Election. The final campaign frenzy is on and all campaigning according to the Election Law has to end 48-hours before the date of the elections.

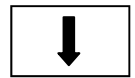
Violence has not taken a rest with it creating anxious moments to most candidates. Some blame it on the Proportional Representation or PR System since the long lists create fighting between candidates to secure a high number of votes. The citizens of this country deserve better and expect a peaceful day of voting or else it will reduce

the voter turnout. A cry for free and fair elections is on everyone's lips. After all this could be the last election except the local government elections for some time to come. What of development. It has been minimal in the north and east. The speed could have been increased especially when resettling the Internally Displaced People in their original homes. It is a tough job, but be that as it may, the war on terrorism ended ten months ago and very little has been done to make this unfortunate segment of Sri Lankans happy.

The south has seen accelerated develop-

ment with a second international airport, a port, an industrial park, an international stadium and a cultural centre in full swing. It is taking shape to be the main hub of activity in Sri Lanka but the north east must not be forgotten or else the ugly hand of terrorism could re-surface. So while political parties fight it out to secure numbers in order to form a government with a majority parliament rather than a hung parliament a thought for the people of Sri Lanka who deserve better must be kept. Candidates promise the earth but will they keep their promises? Let us wait and see.

GOVERNANCE



`Asian` Model of Governance to the Fore

At the General Elections scheduled for April 8, the government is seeking a two-thirds majority that would allow it to change the constitution. The unexpectedly large margin of victory obtained by President Mahinda Rajapakse in the January 26 presidential election – where he won 58% of the vote and 1.8 million more ballots than his rival, General Sarath Fonseka – has demoralised the opposition parties. Victory by the ruling alliance is widely anticipated, with only the margin being in doubt. Indeed, the most vigorous part of the election campaign has been infighting within the government alliance by candidates seeking parliamentary seats at the expense of their own colleagues.

Whereas the presidential campaign held out the real possibility of a change in regime,

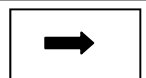
the general election does not. Opposition leaders face a challenge in persuading their supporters to vote at all. A negative mentality prevails among opposition supporters, who think that even if they vote, the result will be manipulated. The opposition's problems have been compounded by the government's lack of adherence to election laws that deny the use of state resources to be used for the purposes of electioneering. The abuse of the state media and other resources such as vehicles and buildings to promote the election campaign of the ruling alliance candidate was a notable feature of the Presidential election, and continues to be so in the case of the General Election.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has announced that he will set up an expert committee to advise him on Sri Lanka's human rights situation, drawing sharp criticism from the Sri Lankan government. The government's consistent position on this

issue has been that whatever happened during the period of the war with the LTTE, and subsequently, is an internal matter. The government has also been very critical of those international and local organizations that have called for investigations into the allegations of human rights violations, with the local ones feeling more under threat than their international counterparts.

The government is looking to achieve a large election victory in support of its vision for an `Asian` model of development. The impunity that is rife where violations of law by those in government is concerned was seen in the attack on the MTV television station in the heart of Colombo. Current trends suggest that there is no independent system of checks and balances in the short term, but well-entrenched democratic norms, coupled with a failure to deliver the promised economic development could cause a backlash at a later date.

HUMAN RIGHTS



Election Petitions

This month being the month following the Presidential Elections, many election petitions have been filed highlighting several matters relating to human rights violations that had taken place during the elections. Now it is left to the Courts to adjudicate on the allegations. One of the allegations is that the rights of voters in the North to have easy access to polling stations had been denied by the non-provision of the promised transport facilities. Consequently a large number of voters from the welfare centres and the IDPs who had just been resettled, could not cast their votes. In another instance it has been pointed out

to the courts that the polling booths in Kilinochchi had been located in places where even the local population could not have easy access. Some had to walk as much as seven kilometers to get to the polling station. No local public transport had been available on that day. Based on these and other allegations the petitions seeks a declaration from Court that the conduct of the respondents had resulted in a violation of their fundamental rights to use their franchise and the right to have equal opportunities to enjoy that right. With the forthcoming Parliamentary Elections it is hoped that these shortcomings will be rectified and the all the people who are eligible to vote would get an equal opportunity to exercise their right to vote.

Right to information

It had been alleged this month by the Democratic National Alliance (DNA) that the government had blocked the website launched by that party and demanded the immediate release of its leader Retired General Sarath Fonseka. However Telecom Regulatory Commission has denied any knowledge of this blocking. Yet it needs to be stressed that blocking a website tantamounts to a denial of the right to information by the citizens. It is hoped that if there is any truth in this allegation, remedial action needs to be taken forthwith.

Petition against State media

It is reported this month that a fundamental rights violation petition had been filed against the Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation (SLRC) and the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC) for the alleged abuses of State resources and partisan use of State media resulting in the violation of directives issued by the Commissioner of Elections.

It has been alleged that this resulted in the violation of the petitioners' franchise and the fundamental rights to equality and equal protection of the law as well as freedom of speech and expression. There is reported to have even been an unequal distribution of air time to the various parties.

Such actions do not augur well for a free and fair election and the promotion and protection of human rights of the citizens. It

is hoped such violations will be minimized during the forthcoming Parliamentary Elections.



Source: news.bbc.co.uk

Probes on NGOs

It is an undeniable fact that non-governmental organizations had played an important role in providing assistance to the people of Sri Lanka both in normal times and during times of emergencies. It cannot also be denied that there had been a few

unscrupulous organizations that had acted in a manner as to damage the reputation of such institutions. This has resulted in unfair allegations being made against all NGOs for various malpractices.

Most of these NGOs provide humanitarian assistance to the people and had been a boon to those in need.

Disciplining the police

This month there had been more than one welcome instance of the IGP taking disciplinary action against errant police officers. Four police constable attached to the Mount Lavinia Crimes Investigation Unit who had been alleged to have sexually abused a girl at the beach, had been arrested and produced before the Mount Lavinia Courts.

They have also been interdicted by the Inspector General of Police. In another instance the Headquarters Inspector of the Trincomalee Police and three other police officers had been interdicted following the killing of a man during a police raid. These indicate that the IGP is keen to maintain discipline and win back the confidence of the public.

However during this month there was another instance of the IGP interdicting eight Chief Inspectors and two Superintendents of Police on the orders of the Defence Secretary. It is a clear instance of political interference in the administration of the Police Department.



Source: Asiatribune

HUMAN SECURITY



Despite the arrest of OIC - Augulana police station and other officers attached to the station last year over the killing of two youth under custody, again the same police manage to draw attention after residents of the area staged a protest in front of the police station over an incident where a youth was assaulted in custody for failure to produce the National Identity Card. The youth was subsequently admitted to hospital. 25 civilians were arrested by the Batticaloa police while they were planning to flee

illegally to Australia.

According to reports issued to the media by Police revealed that there is a high incidence of sexual harassment, and rape in the country. Not a single day does not pass without a rape case or an incident of sexual harassment being reported. "a father raping his own daughter, the teacher raping the student or a principle raping a school girl."

The most heartbreaking incident reported during the month was passing way of a 4 - year -old Amila Sandaruwan Fernando who was thrown in to the Kalugaga by his mother on the 4th March. Ultimately the mother was arrested - as it is politically correct to do so. Did anyone "ask" her "why", what they will do now is "question" her "why" and punish her for the action without considering "Why"...

CIVIL SOCIETY AND MEDIA SPACE



I commence the commentary on Media Space and Civil Society for the Month of March on 23rd of March. It is an interesting date as a point of arrival or departure (with apologies to Arthur Koestler the author of that famous novel *Arrival and Departure*. (His other famous work is "Darkness at Noon") On the 22nd of March a band of hooligans arriving in a bus attacked the head office of the MTV one of the country's leading Television networks around mid day.

As all privately owned media institutions in the country the MTV network attempts to practice what I would call an impartial coverage of political news with that instinctive desire of the trapeze artist to impress the audience while maintaining the delicate balance more on the side of caution than a daring display of mastery of his art. That is understandable. The environment calls for a careful control of the temperature to preserve the precious little of what is left of free public debate. Let us hope the events of the 22nd of March at the MTV head quarter's marks a departure from blatant hooliganism and not the arrival of an open display at high noon the possibility of a Crystal Night.

There is reason for alarm. All the Vice Chancellors of the Universities and the Chairman of the University Grants commission have openly declared their political allegiance to the ruling party. Possibly they have good reasons to do so. Yet as heads of institutions of higher learning such open declarations serve to inhibit the process of free inquiry – the *raison d'être* of academic pursuits. It can only serve as yet another obstacle that will curb the emergence of a vibrant civil society.

The Government seems to be burdened with an insurmountable distrust of civil society. They consider civil society as interfering busy bodies who seek to usurper the legitimate functions of the elected government. It seems that it either rejects or does not appreciate the need for public oversight. This

is understandable. It is the creation of the media that has taken upon itself the sole monopoly of being the watch dog of public interest.

The failure of civil society is that it has failed to impress upon the government as well as the people it seeks to serve that politics is not the business of civil society. If the gov-



Source: ABoutsrilanka.com

ernment considers civil society as a threat, it is for the civil society to impress upon the government that its purpose is to serve society in a non coercive manner to achieve identified social objectives avoiding the emergence of an adversarial relation with state authority.

This requires the active collaboration of civil society and the media. It is the responsibility of Civil Society as well as the media to persuade the government that Freedom and Public security are not irreconcilable. At this point of time it is little far fetched, for the simple reason that many influential scribes tend to influence events than reporting them.

The print media seems to have arrived at a new strategy where they could come to terms with divine authority as well as that of the Caesars. The Ravaya Editor makes available all his pages for critical comments of the authorities while the op ed pages are his sole domain where he in brilliantly circum-

lessly demolishes the critics of the ruling party. The Daily Mirror in one of its editorials under the caption BAN goes Ballistic took to task the UN Secretary General. Whether the UN boss is right or wrong is a matter that will be decided by the member states of the world body. Punning on his Korean name does not reflect the standards of editorial eloquence set by the great master of this art who once graced the news papers founded by the Press Mogul D.R..Wjewardene.

He is featured as an illustrious ancestor by the son of the Present owner of the News Papers Conglomerate in his advertisements promoting his candidacy at the general election. He promises to continue the values of an era when political power passed from the colonial rulers to the landed gentry (The Local Whigs of that by gone era.) Both civil society and Media are in crisis. Civil Society has to protect citizens freedom not only in a political context but also in terms of mobilizing support for socially proactive initiatives not waiting till a deranged mother throws a child in to river.

The Media has to rediscover its integrity in printing or telecasting all the news that is fit to print or aired. This may not be possible due to other constraints. If that be the case they should refrain from making announcements such as we are most viewed channel or we are the most popular news paper. In a country such as Sri Lanka where media literacy is not highly developed (current poster war is illustrative of our media literacy) it is equivalent to the Sinhala proverb "providing ladders to monkeys already swing from tree to tree." Here I should return again to Arthur Koestler's "Arrival and Departure" The main protagonist in this fearful allegory Peter discovers that power can corrupt not only its wielders but its victims as well. That is the dilemma of the main stream press as well as those misguided elements who are being shown on the TV screens pelting stones at MTV studio head quarters.

ECONOMIC CONTEXT



There were no surprises on the economic front in March. While the politicians were consumed with campaign rhetoric for the parliamentary elections the voters in general did not display much appetite for exercising their so called sovereign right to

elect law makers. The operative term that guided economic decision making in March was "postponed until after the election." The government says that it will present the 2010 budget after the election. The IMF says that it will revisit the issue of the suspended third tranche of \$326m of the

\$2.6b standby loan also after the election. A delegation of senior officials visited Brussels to persuade the EU to withdraw the suspension of the GSP+ tariff concession due to go into effect in August of this year. They returned with no firm response from the European Union. Presumably the EU

would watch what the Rajapakse administration would do after the election. In March reinsurance premium and terrorism policy premium were cut down but a full evaluation by Lloyds Registry of UK will also have to await the conclusion of the General Elections. The Colombo All Share Price Index (ASPI) reflected the general mood of the investors and the country awaiting the verdict of the election. At the beginning of March ASPI stood at a little over 3,800. Over the month it fluctuated to close at the end of the month down by about 2.5%.

However, the need for funds to meet government fiscal obligations could not await the conclusion of the elections. The 2009 budget was almost totally off target. The Treasury announced that the 2009 budget deficit (excluding grants) was a whopping 10.2% of GDP that was way above the originally estimated 7.0%. The actual revenue collected was below estimate and actual spending was above estimate. The drop in revenue is largely attributable to a Rs 100b drop in export income that would have cut into corporate and profit taxes and a Rs 400b drop in imports that would have cut import tariff revenue.

On the spending side the now familiar chain

of events unfolded. Recurrent spending, most notably interest on the public debt and wages and salaries, were above estimate by 7.4% and capital spending was below by 15.1%.

However, the latter was not sufficient to offset the former in absolute rupee terms. A reduction in capital spending is not ideal recipe for job creation and growth.

To the government's credit some projects such as the 900mw Norocholai coal-fired power plant will make a significant contribution to growth. The second stage to produce 300mw was inaugurated this month. However, low productivity ventures such as Mihin Air get scarce tax rupees from the capital budget that calls into question the economic wisdom of the Rajapaksa administration.

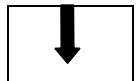
The government that is desperate for funds issued Sri Lanka Development Bonds (SLDBs) worth \$100m in early March. Foreign and local commercial banks took \$45m in two-year bonds with an interest rate of US dollar six month LIBOR +380 basis points and \$55m in three-year bonds with an interest rate of six months LIBOR plus 395 basis points.

The Central Bank helped by a sharp drop in

oil prices managed to squeeze out inflation from the economy in the past twelve to fifteen months. The Colombo Consumer Price Index rose 6.3% in March year-on-year down from 6.9% in February. The Bank announced in March that it will hold its "policy rates" unchanged. However, market rates, as reflected in the three month Treasury bill rate has been rising since last November reflecting the demand for funds from the government. The private sector loudly complains that it is being crowded out by government borrowing.

The government will not find it easy to present the next Budget. The donors will demand fiscal discipline and effective measures to cure the financial bleeding that occurs in state undertakings such as the Ceylon Electricity Board and the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation. However it does not deter the government from making extravagant promises to the electorate. For example, wage hikes are promised to public sector employees. Seventeen thousand unemployed graduates have been promised government jobs. Sales taxes have been cut. Cutting the fiscal deficit is going to be a very unpleasant task for the next Minister of Finance, who in Sri Lanka happens to be the President himself.

HUMANITARIAN & DEVELOPMENT SPACE



With the general elections just around the corner, the plight of the IDPs seems to have again receded to the background. Reports of fresh resettlements were not in evidence during this period, though mine clearance efforts are continuing.

The need for intervention in these regions therefore remains essential and urgent. Elsewhere in Kalutara, a mother of five, throwing her youngest child to the river dominated the news. This is a family of tsu-

nami victims who are steeped in poverty. It is a reminder that even in the 'prosperous' Western Province, there are pockets of vulnerable poverty stricken groups and individuals who are driven to actions of this kind.

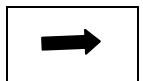
It is also a reminder to us as a humanitarian community, that once provision of material aid alone is not sufficient to uplift the conditions of the communities we serve. Psychological support should go hand in

hand with material aid. Moreover, close involvement with beneficiaries over a period of time to ensure that proper benefits are reaped through assistance provided is also needed.

The space to intervene?

With the earthquake in Chile, funds that could come to Sri Lanka has got restricted further. With added strains on relations between the government and the international agencies this situation does not show signs of improvement.

ENVIRONMENT



Rain arrived in many parts of the island to break the long drought that had kept the country in its grip since January. However very dry conditions remain in many areas including the central hills where fires, many deliberately lit to clear underbrush, have ravaged hillsides and forest patches. The rains that did arrive brought with them thunderstorms and lightning creating potentially dangerous conditions with two deaths due to lightning being recorded.



On March 27th Sri Lanka joined with over 4000 cities around the world to observe "Earth Hour", a one hour period where all non-essential lights were to be turned off in

a token gesture to alleviate energy consumption.

A special task force was set up by the Ministry of Healthcare and Nutrition to once again look into the rising dengue crisis across the

island. Over 60 people have died from the disease so far this year. Dengue is spread by mosquitoes that breed in standing water, so maintaining a clean environment free of trapped water is an important part of combating the disease.

March 22nd was "World Water Day" and was commemorated in Sri Lanka with the Water Supply and Drainage Board unveiling plans to set up another water purification unit in Ambatale. The Danish government is to provide 5 billion rupees for the project, slated to be completed in 2015 and provide drinking water to 85% of the population.

On the other side of the spectrum a more sustainable solution of rainwater harvesting was discussed by the Lanka Rainwater Harvesting Forum event at which the Minister for Urban Development Dinesh Gunawardena spoke of the laws being in acted to ensure that all new buildings of a certain

size incorporate rainwater harvesting as part of the building plans.

The controversial reopening and reconstruction of the old Mannar road which runs through the Wilpattu National Park has been in the media and has many parties trying to ensure that it does not remain

open to the public. A second road running parallel and seemingly having no real purpose other than as yet unverified spurious interests is more of a concern, posing as a direct threat to increasing the already porous park boundary.

DISTRICT ANALYSIS (PERIOD OF REVIEW- 27/2/2010 TO 26/3/2010)

AMPARA

Reports of election malpractices and human rights violations are rising in Ampara, and relations between the public and the Police, who the public allege are ignoring these incidents, are strained.

As the resettlement process continues, land

issues are soon turning into communal disputes, as the different communities allege their land is being encroached upon or illegally occupies by members of other communities.

While election campaigning continued through the month, the public seemed

disinterested and cynical regarding the eventual outcome. A majority of the district is disillusioned regarding paramilitary activity, apparently supported by various political parties. It is vital that the relevant authorities take appropriate action to ensure the safety and security of the people of the district.

BATTICALOA

The TNA has accused the Government of unnecessarily strengthening the Army and Navy camps in the district, while the Government justifies their actions saying the camps are being strengthened to protect the Tamil community from residual

elements of the LTTE and other potential threats.

Following the arrest of 25 people attempting to illegally migrate to Australia, the Police media spokesman Prashantha Jayakody stated that the number of illegal migrations has increased.

The common view is that the trend in illegal migration is increasing as people continue to be insecure regarding their safety and future.

COLOMBO

An unprecedented number of candidates will participate at the forthcoming general elections. The number of independent groups far exceeds the number of registered political parties. General Sarath Fonseka has also filed nominations for a seat in the Colombo parliamentary district. He will lead an alliance floated by the JVP, named the Democratic National Alliance. The two serious contending opposition parties are considered to be the JVP and the DNA. This division in serious opposition however is

seen as increasing the chances of the ruling UPFA gaining at least a simple majority.

If the UPFA is able to secure a two-thirds majority, it is likely to change the present constitution.

There is however the possibility that arbitrary constitutional changes will be effected without the necessary political consensus. As the votes of the minority communities are likely to hold great sway, the forthcoming election provides the minorities the opportunity to make their voices heard. There

is some concern however about the Tamil vote, due to the large number of displaced Tamils. The Commissioner of Elections must do the needful to ensure that these people receive their voting cards. A US\$ 18 million World Bank loan for the development of the Tourist industry, and a US\$ 40 million loan from the Korea Import/Export Bank for the Hatton-Nuwara Eliya Road Development project is bound to boost the country's economy and infrastructure, in line with the present Government's development plans for the country.

JAFFNA

While the political parties allied with the Government carried on their election campaigns vociferously, it seems opposition parties are conducting their campaigns on a more muted note.

have been attacked. .

The youth are conspicuously absent from the proceedings and very few people are willing to make their opinion and party of preference known.

Trade in Jaffna has increased, and together with development programmes initiated by the Government will hopefully help in the speedy development of the district. The resettlement of IDPs remains an urgent issue which needs to be more proactively addressed by the relevant authorities

Several of these party candidates have received personal threats and their supporters

MANNAR

Security forces, acting upon information given by the public and LTTE cadres in custody, unearthed large caches of arms and ammunition from Adampan and Killinochchi.

An episcopacy of Bishops visited Mannar and Vavuniya to hand over several relief items as well as to gather firsthand information from the resettled families regarding their most urgent requirements. The Bishops handed over 500 bicycles, several solar and oil lamps, clothing for school children and school items worth Rs. 3.5 million.

They reported that 50% of the resettled families have only government issues tin roofing sheets to protect them from the scorching sun. There is also a severe shortage of drinking water. School children face

the hardship of a 4 kilometre walk to school with little food to sustain them.

Meanwhile, the public are also vociferous in their demand that the State assist them in regaining the possessions they lost during the war, including transport vehicles and farming and fishing equipment.

Many people have yet been unable to secure employment. Several resettled IDPs returned to their villages to find their homes destroyed by the war and looters. Their difficulties are compounded by the red tape they face in obtaining official documents, especially death certificates.

Meanwhile, due to the high temperature prevailing in the country, and the North and

East in particular, the Giant Tank is drying up, with only 16,000 of a possible 23,000 acres of land being cultivated. Of the 16,000 acres being cultivated, 3,000 acres of crops were destroyed due to the lack of water for irrigation.

Following the conclusion of the war, many Sri Lankans in refugee camps now wish to return to Sri Lanka. However, they reportedly face many bureaucratic difficulties in obtaining the necessary documentation to do so.

However, a small number of Sri Lankan Tamils continue to leave to India, Tamil Nadu authorities reported. The long awaited new bridge and causeway connecting Mannar Island with the mainland was declared open on March 18th by President Mahinda Rajapakse. The bridge was constructed at a cost of Rs. 2,460 million under a JICA funded project.

TRINCOMALEE

In Trincomalee, it seems the Tamil community is keen to support the Tamil parties contesting the elections. The TNA is campaigning hard with the aim of winning a resounding victory.

However, there are several other Tamil parties which are also contesting, and it is possible the Tamil votes may be split, resulting in a close-run election for the district. This

could be a blow for the district, as the people feel that only through strong Tamil representation from Trincomalee will their needs be adequately addressed in Parliament. The number of tourists travelling to the district has seen a drastic downturn due to the forthcoming elections, and tourist hotels and inns in the district, as well as other complementary industries, are in dire financial straits.

Meanwhile, trade continues to pick up following the opening of the A9 road, creating more employment and income generating opportunities.

After a lapse of 30 years, the temple deities of the historical Koneswaram Hindu temple were taken on procession throughout Trincomalee town. The temple's annual festival commenced on March 29.

VAVUNIYA

Democracy in Vavuniya seems to be on the rise as several independent groups and political parties prepare to contest at the forthcoming parliamentary elections.

Compared to other electoral districts however, Vavuniya is putting forward fewer candidates, as well as reporting less violence and breaches of election violence.

Public interest in the elections also seems to be at a minimum. Larger transparent plastic ballot boxes are to be used for the elections, enabling the public to see how far the boxes have been filled, in a bid to ensure more transparency in the voting process.

The Government Agent of Vavuniya has reportedly made special arrangements including free transport to polling booths, to enable voters from Killinochchi and Mullaitivu to exercise their franchise.

To this end, those wishing to make use of this service were been asked to register at



Source: Colombo Asia News
the Vavuniya district office by the end of March.

In a Fundamental Rights petition, the Supreme Court ruled that all detention camps be brought under the Police, and not the Army, as was the case with some camps in Vavuniya and Anuradhapura.

Around 26,000 school children in camps are attending temporary IDP camp schools, but are finding it difficult to cope with extremely limited resources.

The Presidential Task Force has granted approval to more NGOs to work in the resettled areas. These NGOs are involved in erecting temporary and permanent shelters, and livelihood and nutritional assistance programmes. In addition, the Indian High Commissioner opened a prosthetic fitting unit at Manik farm in March, for the benefit of 2000 disabled persons in the IDP and detention camps on.

We're on the web!
Visit us at :

http://www.humanitarian-srilanka.org/Knowledge_Centre/Publications.php

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

Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies (Gte) Limited,
86, Rosmead Place,
Colombo 7,
Sri Lanka

Phone/Fax: 94-114 610943