

RAPID CONTEXT ASSESSMENT



National Analysis

- Political Context 2
- Governance 2
- Security Context 2
- Human Rights 3
- Economic Context 3
- Civil Society & Media Space 3
- Humanitarian & Development Space 4
- External actors 4

District Analysis

- Amparai 4
- Batticaloa 5
- Colombo 5
- Jaffna 5
- Mannar 6
- Trincomalee 6
- Vavuniya 7

TREND ANALYSIS GRID

Political Context	➡
Governance	↘
Security Context	⬇
Human Rights	↘
Economic Context	➡
Civil Society & Media Space	↘
Humanitarian & Dev. Space	↘
External Actors	↘

INDICATOR REFERENCES

No change	➡	Slightly improving	↗	Slightly deteriorating	↘
Significantly improving	⬆	Significantly deteriorating	⬇		

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



President Mahinda Rajapakse and Opposition Leader Ranil Wickremasinghe met recently to discuss how the 13th amendment to the Constitution which created Provincial Councils could be fully implemented as a step towards the peaceful resolution of the ethnic conflict. Mr. Wickremasinghe was of the view that the Government should implement the 17th amendment, which established an independent Constitutional Council, designed to ensure good governance.

Following the abrogation of the Cease Fire Agreement (CFA), the war has intensified in the North. The majority of the Sinhalese and the Tamils who are opposed to the LTTE support the Government strategy, with the opposition UNP also quietly acquiescing.

Good governance and the rule of law continued to come under pressure during the month under review. The government has failed to implement the 17th amendment, the President instead exercising his executive powers over state agencies such as the Police, the Human Rights Commission and several other similar institutions which should ideally function more independently. With the Government and a few political parties portraying civil society organisations which criticise the war as an option as being pro-terrorist, the scope for constructive engagement

between the Government and civil society has reduced. The pressure that the international community could bring to bear upon the Government to mend its ways is also limited.

The security situation in the country was tense in February 2008. A spate of bomb attacks in Colombo and elsewhere resulted in a large number of civilian deaths. Aerial bombing by the SL Air Force of LTTE-controlled areas also reportedly caused significant civilian casualties. At least one donor, Germany, has threatened to reduce or cut off aid unless the Government makes a serious effort to de-escalate the war and seek a peaceful solution to the conflict. Japan also has signalled that it will be more “discriminatory” in future aid allocation to Sri Lanka.

Donors should however take a more long term view of events if they wish to help Sri Lanka attain sustainable peace, rather than adopting short term positions which do more harm than good.

Data gathered from the news media suggests that human rights violations in the form of civilian killings, abductions, arrests and detentions on grounds of threat to national security continued more or less unabated in February 2008.

Key sections of the Sinhala media are increasingly showing a strong bias in favour of the war strategy of the Government. Their reports often provoke emotional reactions from their readers/audience. Re-

cently, NGOs that question the human rights record of the Government have been criticized by certain sections of the media. The Sinhala press has little coverage of the conditions of civilians in the war areas, but a section of the Tamil press carries regular news reports from those areas.

On the economic front the Government got the bad news that Standard and Poor had downgraded its sovereign credit rating from “stable” to “negative” mainly on account of the growing fiscal deficit. The deficit that has caused large scale Government borrowing from banks has led to double digit inflation now hovering above 20% per annum. The government has failed to show the fiscal discipline that the 2003 Fiscal Responsibility Act demands of it. There is controversy about the new Colombo Consumer Price Index that some believe has been designed to understate the true rate of inflation that the urban low income groups confront.

On the humanitarian front a major concern during the month was the restrictions that the government placed for “security reasons” on the transport of goods via Medawachchiya to the North and North-East. Reports from the Vanni suggest that this is causing considerable hardship to the civilian population of the area. UNHCR reported that there were about 190,000 IDPs in the island at the beginning of February 2008. In the Eastern Province the attention of the Government has been on the conduct of the local government elections pushing development work and IDP resettlement to the back burner.

NATIONAL ANALYSIS

POLITICAL CONTEXT



The political temperature in Sri Lanka is likely to cool in the coming months following the meeting between President Rajapakse and Opposition Leader Ranil Wickramasinghe in the last week of February. The key issue at the meeting was the "full" implementation of the 13th Amendment, which devolved power to the provinces in 1987, including a merged North and East, as a solution to the country's ethnic war. The Amendment was however not fully implemented as no proper elections to Provincial governments in the war torn areas were ever held.

The Opposition has however stressed that it wants provisions in the 17th Amendment implemented as well. This amendment de-

politicizes key Government departments and ensures a level playing field for political parties at future elections.

The situation at the war front has however been heating up. There is a paucity of information coming from the North where the SL Army is engaged with LTTE in an effort to enter the Vanni, which is currently held by the rebels. The fighting thus far is said to have claimed the lives of nearly 1,600 LTTE cadres and 92 Government soldiers. Independent verification of these figures is impossible due to access to the battlegrounds being denied to neutral parties.

It seems that this year will be a decisive one for the war. In 25 years or civil conflict,

there have been thousands of casualties. Civilians have suffered on both sides with non-military targets being taken by the LTTE after the formal abrogation of the CFA. However the first two months of the year are yet to produce a major decisive victory for either side. The Government is at a greater advantage due to not having to expend troops in the East, after the LTTE lost their territory to the TMVP. The military believes the loss of the East means the Tigers will find it harder to replace the fighters lost in battle. The Government has been able to convince the majority of the Sinhalese and the Tamils opposed to the LTTE that military victory is at hand.

GOVERNANCE



Constructive Engagement Necessary to Ensure Good Governance

One of the striking characteristics of the present government is its willingness to challenge principles of good governance in order to achieve its objectives. The executive powers of the Presidency are being used to its fullest by President Rajapakse. The President has shown himself reluctant to implement the 17th Amendment to the Constitution – it is an example of the desire to concentrate power at the cost of constitutional provisions. In the absence of the Constitutional Council, the President has exercised his powers to

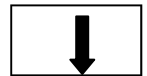
make appointments to key national institutions, such as the Police, Human Rights Commission and Public Service at his discretion, which has impaired the credibility and legitimacy of those appointments.

The recent decision of the President to remove the Director General of the Bribery Commission, who was investigating high profile cases of corruption, including the alleged corruption involving the purchase of Air Force planes, is yet another slap in the face for the rule of law. Even the Opposition parties appear to be powerless to

influence the government. Therefore it is necessary that the international community should apply pressure on the government to observe the basic principles of good governance.

In seeking to defeat the LTTE, the government appears to be losing sight of its commitment to democratic values and to good governance. One such example is the overt governmental hostility against those who advocate a negotiated political settlement with the LTTE and those who lobby and act on behalf of human rights.

SECURITY CONTEXT



A spate of bomb attacks, claymore mine attacks and aerial bombings in Colombo and remote parts of the Island occurred during February. Sadly, many of the victims have been schoolchildren. These attacks restricted civilian movements to a great extent. On February 2nd over 20 civilians were killed in a bomb explosion which ripped through a crowded passenger bus in Dambulla, injuring 100.

Another explosion in the Colombo Fort Railway Station claimed the lives of seven schoolchildren, as well as two young girls. Due to these incidents, the Government closed schools for one week.

According to Tamil Net reports, Tigers have killed 22 soldiers in fighting in Palaikudhim South of Adampan. On February

10th, eleven LTTE cadres were killed in clashes with the security forces in the Vavuniya Front. Three tigers were killed at Periyapandichurchchan and eight LTTE cadres were killed in the fighting in the Sinnapandichurchchan.

In another incident, two LTTE cadres were killed in a confrontation with troops in Kokkuthuduwai, Weli Oya,. Three soldiers were wounded in a confrontation with the LTTE on the same day, killing one LTTE cadre.

Considering the recent intensified terrorist activities and the ongoing military operations in the North, the Government took strict security measures to prevent the smuggling of contraband to and from the North. This resulted in the imposition of restrictions on the passage of vehicles

through the Medawachchiya road barrier, but the authorities need to realize that these measures only bring hardships to the residents of the Vavuniya and Mannar districts. Traders from Colombo and other areas in the South have suspended their supplies to Vavuniya, increasing the prices of essential consumer goods that are in short supply.

A hartal in Vavuniya and Mannar against the increased number of claymore and bomb attacks brought the two towns to a virtual standstill on February 7th.

Due to the prevailing violence, one of Sri Lanka's main donors, Germany, warned the Government it would cut off aid if the violence continued to escalate

HUMAN RIGHTS



"Use of explosive and ammunition against civilians"

The table below focuses on violations as reported in the different media sources and CHA district reports received from the district.

The use of explosives or fire arms were high compared to previous month and the number of civilian deaths due to the ongoing conflict has increased.

A total of 98 civilians were killed between December 20th 2007 and January 19th 2008. The Monaragala district reported 45 civilian deaths with the Buttala and Thanamalvilla incidents. Batticaloa and Vavuniya district have recorded 18 and 12 civilian deaths respectively, due to shooting or ex-

plosions. Between January 20th January and February 19th 2008, 132 civilians have been reported killed due to explosions or shooting incidents. The highest number of civilians killed during this time period is from the districts of Anuradhapura (30), Matale (22), Mannar (21), Colombo (17) and Jaffna (13). The number of civilians injured due to these shootings and explosions increased to 254, compared to 155 reported from the last week of December to January 19th 2008. (District-wise details could be obtained from hrac@cha.lk)

"Freedom of movement and to be employed in any employment as they wish"

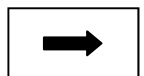
According to news reports, the security

forces have detained many Tamil civilians on suspicion of having links with the LTTE, lack of proper identification papers, or for not having a valid reason to be at a given location. Indiscriminate arrest and detention on suspicion may however lead to a loss in job security as employers may be unwilling to employ potentially suspicious employees.

As reported in the media, the Colombo and Gampaha districts have recorded the highest number of arrests made on suspicion. They were mostly arrested during cordon and search operations carried out by the security forces and police.

Violation	Victim	20/12/07 to 19/1/08 Number	20/1/08 to 19/2/08 Number
Abduction	Civilian	8	22
Arrest	Civilian	633	438
Detention	Civilian	392	416
Forced Displacement	Civilian	16	0
Injury	Civilian	155	257
Killing	Civilian	98	135
Killing	Unknown/Others	4	4

ECONOMIC CONTEXT



Economic Instability Continues

In February Sri Lanka's macroeconomic instability continued unabated. Standard and Poor downgraded Sri Lanka's sovereign rating outlook from "stable" to "negative." The country's B+ debt rating could also be downgraded if the budgetary situation deteriorates. During the month John Keells Holdings signed a standby loan agreement with the World Bank's International Finance Corporation worth \$75m. The agreement allows JKH to borrow, paying the London Interbank Offer Rate (One year LIBOR- 2.85% end February) plus 2.75%, which is less than the 8.25% the government had to pay for the five-year \$500m dollar bond loan that it raised last October. This is an indication that

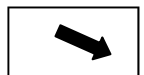
international lenders have considerable confidence in Sri Lanka's private sector at the top end.

For the average Sri Lankan, inflation continues to be the principal economic worry. In 2006 consumer prices rose by 19.6% and in 2007 by 16.4%. The point-to-point inflation in February 2008 was around 22% to 24%. Rising global oil and food prices – the latter rose by over 20% in 2007 – are partly responsible for inflation. But the main factor is heavy domestic bank borrowing by the Government to cover a growing budget deficit. The Fiscal Management (Responsibility) Act of 2003 has failed to

instil the hoped for fiscal discipline.

In March as the *Maha* harvest begins to come in, local produce prices will ease. However, the new electricity tariffs and the recent hike in gas prices, plus the impact of the one hundred dollar-a-barrel oil will not allow Sri Lanka's inflation to ease much. Meanwhile the technical construction of the New Colombo Consumer Price Index (CCPI-N) has also become controversial, as critics accuse the Government of manipulating the index to understate the true rate of inflation, especially for the low income urban households, by reducing the weight given to food.

CIVIL SOCIETY & MEDIA SPACE



The Government in its recent announcement regarding the war seems to have revised its stance of setting deadlines concerning a final victory over the LTTE. Through the manipulation of the messages in the media, the state-owned media in particular, it has successfully avoided creating a public perception of a looming protracted war. The Sinhala TV channel Swarnavhini in its evening news has added a new segment titled

'Rana Bimin'. Although its literal translation is 'from the battle front' the sinhala phrase evokes a deeper sense of heroism, valour and sacrifice taken in the context of Sinhalese historical narrative. The battle scenes of tanks and soldiers moving ever forward in the backdrop of heavy gunfire are file films released by the Defence Ministry media unit.

The Sinhala media provides wide coverage for defence forces attacks on the LTTE, while coverage by the English media is more muted.

The LTTE attacks on civilians in the South and also the killing of innocent school children and teachers of a Colombo school at the Fort Railway station received wide media coverage

This exposure of the brutality of war and terrorism has served to harden the Southern mindset towards the pursuit of war against the LTTE. The hardships undergone by civilians in the North do not receive much coverage in the Sinhala media, although certain

sections of the Tamil media attempt to cover this aspect of the war.

Several civil society organisations came under heavy flak in the month of February

mostly due to their perceived links with, and financial assistance they received from international agencies and governments. The call for good governance by the civil society remains to be answered adequately

HUMANITARIAN & DEVELOPMENT SPACE



The new regulations introduced with regard to the crossing of the Medawachchiya checkpoint was one of the salient features with regard to humanitarian and development space. Functioning as a gateway to the North, Northwest and parts of the East, the supply of goods to a majority of the conflict affected districts are impacted by any change in regulations occurring in Medawachchiya. There are a number of reports that relief agencies have had to curtail the movement of goods to these areas as a result of the current restrictions. A number of collective appeals were made this month and will continue to be made at high level meetings taking place in Colombo to find a resolution to this issue.

The movement of IDPs during this period was low. The current IDP figure stands at 187,863 according to the figures released as at January 31, 2008 by UNHCR. It is also noteworthy that there were reports that some families who refused to resettle were given the option of remaining where they were.

A total of 1327 families still need to be resettled in Chenkalady and Kiran in the Batticaloa District. This is on hold until the mine clearance of these areas is completed. It is also a concern that there are no agencies available for mine clearance of a few *Grama Niladhari* (GN) Divisions in Batticaloa and Trincomalee. Mainly for this reason, the

relocation of families who were to be resettled in these areas is being considered. Most agencies though are of the opinion that this could be a costly exercise and that finding a permanent solution would be a better option.

Preparations are underway for the forthcoming Local Government Elections in Batticaloa. This seems to have affected the urgency in the implementation of the Eastern Development Plan. For this reason some families are still experiencing difficulties in resuming their livelihoods or starting up new livelihood activities. It is hoped that the needs of the destitute are kept foremost in mind at all times.

EXTERNAL ACTORS



Bi-lateral donors seem to have lately noticeably disengaged themselves from the very issues they have sought to concern themselves with.

A proposal to increase the number of co-chairs to include 2-3 more countries seems to have been overshadowed by a greater focus on current efforts with and by the US

and India with SL.

Japan has indicated that in future it would be 'more discriminatory' in its choices when determining aid allocation for SL. It is significant to note that the order of principle aid giving countries China is the principle contributor followed by Japan, ADB and the World Bank.

In the current Sri Lankan context, a long term view of the problems facing the country needs to be adopted by foreign countries that are closely engaged with Sri Lanka. The short term view often evident in the policies that these countries have adopted in recent times is doing more harm than good, and violates the 'do no harm' approach that they profess.

DISTRICT ANALYSIS (PERIOD OF REVIEW-29TH JANUARY TO 28TH FEBRUARY, 2008)

AMPARA

STRUCTURES

The targeting of civilians in shelling and claymore mine attacks has increased in the Ampara district. These attacks include a shelling attack on the Bakmitiyawa village, the claymore mine attack on a bus in Buthala, the attack in Pannalgama and the killing of a Christian pastor, as well as the reappearance of the 'white van', now a symbol of random abductions, which sometimes lead to the abductees being murdered by unidentified groups.

In a bid to control the situation, new security measures have been introduced, such as an increased number of checkpoints, road blocks and house to house search operations.

The local election in the Batticaloa district also had an impact on relations between the Tamil and Muslim communities in the Ampara district. For example, if the Muslim community in Batticaloa comes under attack, Tamil civilians in Ampara immediately retreat into their homes in fear of retaliatory attacks.

ACTORS

In view of the recent changes in the political arena in the East, and the TMVP's assertion that they are the "sole representatives" of the Tamil Community, the TMVP must be considered an important actor. Politicians of political parties operating in the Eastern Province, Security Forces, Police, LTTE and the Jihadist movement are the other main

actors.

DYNAMICS

With TMVP cadres freely moving about with weapons, the role of other political parties such as the TNA, EPRLF, EPDP and the Muslim Congress are now in question.

STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS

The Government as well the political parties operating in the Eastern province need to work together in order to address the needs of the people of Ampara. Community based organizations, NGOs and Government institution should ensure that elections taking place in the district are free and fair, which will positively impact the role political parties are

able to play in the development of the province as well as relations between the Tamil

and Muslim communities in the district.

BATTICALOA

STRUCTURES

Following the announcement of local elections in Batticaloa, the numbers of abductions and killings by unidentified gunmen in the district have considerably reduced. A limited number of TMVP cadres have also now stopped toting weapons in public areas.

However, there are complaints that TMVP cadres are forcing political contestants to contest under the TMVP banner. There are fears that gun toting TMVP members will intimidate people into voting for the TMVP, resulting in an unfairly contested election. As a result, PAFFREL has filed a petition in the Supreme Court asking that an order be issued temporarily disarming the TMVP cadres during the election.

The TMVP have asked the President to postpone the APC until the local election is held. With several political parties opposing this request, and the JVP and JHU supporting it, the issue has created discord among the political parties in the district.

Civilians of the district carry out their livelihoods under great difficulty and the social and economic future of the district is in question. Movement is restricted by the activities of unidentified armed groups operating in the district, as well the setting up of new checkpoints and roadblocks.

ACTORS

In view of the forthcoming election, politicians and the TMVP can be considered the main actors in the district, especially as they play a vital role in terms of the security and political situation in the district. Government Forces and local and international NGO personnel are also important actors in the district.

DYNAMICS

The local government election is the main event currently affecting the dynamics of the district. The activities of the TMVP and their request for the postponement of the APC are also important in this context. With other political parties opposing this request, the people fear that this could lead to violent

conflicts during the election.

With the TMVP intimidating contestants into contesting under their banner, and the LTTE issuing letters threatening dire consequences if they do so, tensions and fears are extremely high in the district.

The majority of the people are also of the view that the TMVP candidates are not experienced or knowledgeable enough to function as council members

STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS

The volatile political situation in the district is of great concern and needs to be addressed by all relevant parties. Concrete action needs to be taken by the Government to ensure a free and fair election in the province. The movement of armed groups should be restricted and the Security Forces should work towards ensuring the security of the people of the district.

COLOMBO

STRUCTURES

The month began with the tragic death of 18 civilians including seven schoolchildren, with 32 others being injured, when a suicide bomber exploded a bomb at the Colombo Fort railway station.

As people feared more LTTE attacks targeting civilians using public transport during the rush hour, the Security Forces diverted more resources towards preventing attacks in Colombo. Rumours of bomb attacks on schools and other public places resulted in a panic stricken public, with schools being temporarily closed and people undertaking only essential travel.

According to LTTE cadres arrested during search operations, there is a sizeable presence of guerrilla cadres in the greater Co-

lombo area.

Public vigilance contributed to the aversion of a disaster when a bomb was identified on a private bus, and the bus was evacuated.

The people of Colombo are finding the increasing cost of living increasingly challenging as wages fail to rise to match the increase in the prices of goods.

ACTORS

The Police, Security Forces, and the LTTE are the main actors in the district.

DYNAMICS

The skyrocketing cost of living is, as always, a pivotal issue in the dynamics of the district.

With the possibility of bomb attacks on schools and public places in Colombo, schools have resorted to checking the schoolbags of students, while carrying electrical items such as laptops or radios on trains is now banned.

STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS

Civilians should be educated on how to respond to a possible bomb threat on public transport. Guidelines should be introduced to educate school staff, children, school van drivers as well as security personnel on how to act in the face of a bomb threat or attack.

Steps also need to be taken to control the rising cost of living.

JAFFNA

STRUCTURES

While the city of Jaffna is relatively calm, heavy fighting between the SLA and the LTTE continues at the FDL, with Nagarkovil,

Kilaly and Muhamalai recording the most number of confrontations. Fighting seems likely to continue for some time as both the Army and the LTTE continue to replenish

their troops and military hardware.

Sixteen people, including security forces personnel and LTTE cadres, were killed

in Jaffna during the month according to the UNDSS report, with 17 injured.

With the attack on the SL Navy by the LTTE taking cover behind Indian fishing vessels, fishing activities have been further restricted, adding tension to a district which depends on fishing as their main livelihood. The Government assured the people that the district is stocked with two months worth of food supplies. Except for a small decrease in the price of rice and vegetables, the prices of other essential items have been steadily increasing.

ACTORS

The main actors are the Government forces and the LTTE, while the ICRC and local and international NGOs are also playing a prominent role.

DYNAMICS

There seems to be no alleviation of the current situation and it seems that the people of the district will have to undergo great hardship as a result of the war for a long time to come.

Skyrocketing inflation and ongoing fighting in close proximity to civilian settlements continue to adversely affect the quality of life of the residents of Jaffna.

STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS

The people of the district need to be provided with adequate security in face of the war raging virtually in their backyards.

The people also need to be provided with stable sources of income generation so that they can continue with their daily lives. An emergency transport mechanism also needs to be set up, especially to transport critically ill or injured patients to hospital.

MANNAR

STRUCTURES

With the dawn of Independence Day on 4 February 4th, nearly 400 Indian fishing boats entered the seas of Thalaimannar, while LTTE boats taking cover behind the fishing boats attacked the SL Navy. The encounter left 6 Naval officers missing, while LTTE casualties were not reported. Subsequent to this event, two fishermen hiding dynamite in their boats were arrested by the Police at Pallimunai.

A hartal was staged in Mannar town to protest against the killing of civilians in a suicide bomb attack at the Colombo Fort railway station, as well as at Weli Oya and Thatchanamadhu.

Search operations and round ups are conducted by the Security Forces, which also continue to launch mortar attacks on LTTE

bunkers around Parupukaddanthan. While the number of killings and abductions by unidentified groups is falling, casualties as a result of the war are rising.

As a result of these and other incidents, the situation in Mannar remains volatile and unpredictable, and the residents live under a high degree of tension.

ACTORS

The main actors in the district are the Government Forces and the LTTE. The rising number of IDPs is also significant in this context.

DYNAMICS

IDPs continue to straggle into government controlled areas, creating an additional strain on the Government in terms of provi-

sion of accommodation, food and other basic facilities.

As the demand for essential goods increases with the increasing number of IDPs, an environment conducive to smuggling is likely to be created. This in turn is likely to lead to more rigorous searching at check points, greatly inconveniencing the civilian population in general.

STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS

In case of a sudden exodus of IDPs into Mannar, INGOs and NGOs need to be prepared to provide adequate relief in terms of food and medical supplies, especially in terms of the existing food shortage prevailing in the district due to restrictions on the movement of vehicles out of Medawachchiya.

TRINCOMALEE

STRUCTURES

The situation in Trincomalee remained calm during the month, due in part to the increased presence and vigilance of the Security Forces in the district. The other reasons behind the relative calm are, however, not as straightforward. The public are nervous to travel following the recent attacks on public transport and in public places in other parts of the country.

Civilians have reduced their travelling to the most essential of journeys, having an impact on the incomes earned by three wheeler drivers and private bus operators.

Several search operations jointly carried out by the Security Forces and the Police resulted in several Tamil youths being taken in

for questioning.

Activities by unidentified armed groups continue, with an increased number of thefts and abductions taking place.

The IDPs continue to languish in inadequate shelters with no proper sanitation facilities, which could lead to the spread of illnesses such as diarrhoea, dengue and malaria.

While several relief programmes have been formulated for the communities affected by the war, assistance is yet to reach them due to corruption, red tape and restrictions on NGOs.

ACTORS

Political groups such as the JVP and the

JHU, the media, ICRC, local and international NGOs and UN agencies, as well as the Security Forces, the TMVP and unidentified armed groups can be considered the main actors.

DYNAMICS

As abductions and killings continue, some of the male Tamil youth population have resorted to migrating to India and Europe. The number of school dropouts has also increased as parents fear to send their children to school in the face of the volatile situation.

More cases of theft and looting have been reported during the month.

No proper livelihood plan has been for-

mulated for the IDPs and resettled families in Trincomalee. Each NGO has formulated its own program and implements it according to its own mandate.

STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS

Programmes need to be formulated to economically empower the civilians affected by the war, enabling them to carry out some form of livelihood activity.

Civilians need to be provided adequate protection from unidentified armed groups, as the residents of the district are unable to carry on with their daily activities due to fear of these groups.

VAVUNIYA

STRUCTURES

The situation in Vavuniya remains volatile, with intensified ground operations between SLA and LTTE at FDL areas and an increase in the number of mines, ammunition and IEDs recovered. Security measures have been strengthened, and security checks on all vehicles including those of the UN now include dismantling certain interior and exterior parts of the vehicle and deflating spare tyres. Impromptu road blocks and cordon and search operations conducted by the military and police contribute to the high level of tension along the A9 and A14 roads.

A mine surveillance exercise has been initiated in certain areas and a mine clearance certificate was received by the UNHCR Vavuniya for 50% of allocated land (80 acres - Poosanipittiya, Settikulam Village). This has been forwarded to the Divisional Secretariat (DS) for follow up action

The number of IDPs continues to increase as the war escalates, with more IDPs choosing to move to either Government controlled areas or India. The displaced families are looked after by the DS office and respective Agencies.

The IDPs at the Kalmadu relocation site in Vavuniya have not received dry rations for the past three months. When the UNHCR

raised this matter with the GA, they were assured that two months worth of food rations would be delivered to the camp before the end of the month.

Arrests and abductions by unidentified groups continue, and the dreaded 'white van', allegedly often used by these kidnapers, has made a comeback in the district.

Following the removal of checkpoints from within the IDP camps, the numbers of abductions and killings within the camp have marginally increased. The UNHCR has requested that a police presence be established at certain welfare centres, but action has yet to be taken in this regard. The residents of the camps, especially those with adolescent sons, who seem to be the target group of the kidnapers, live in great fear,

ACTORS

The Security Forces, Police, TMVP, unidentified armed groups, PLOTE, EPDP, LTTE and paramilitary groups are the main actors in terms of confrontational activity, while Government officials, INGOs and NGOs and the IDPs are important actors.

DYNAMICS

With the Defence Ministry decision to stop vehicles travelling from Vavuniya at

Medawachchiya, and train and bus services from Colombo to Medawachchiya being curtailed, passengers travelling South face a great deal of hardship.

An increased number of killings and abductions were noted during the last week of February, increasing tensions in the district.

No vehicles travelling from beyond Madawachchiya are permitted to enter the Vavuniya district, except the GA's vehicle, the post office van and ambulances. All items carried in incoming vehicles are unloaded at Medawachchiya, and then reloaded into vehicles coming from Vavuniya which hold passes issued by the Security Forces.

STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS

A contingency plan needs to be formulated by the Government and the NGOs involved in providing rehabilitation and relief to the IDPs, to deal with a sudden escalation in conflict in the district. The Government also needs to look at ways of reducing the current restrictions on NGOs in order to enable them to carry out their activities effectively.

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 peacebuilding (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 peacepa1@cha.lk

Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies
30/81 Longden Place,
Colombo 7, Sri Lanka
Phone/Fax: 94-112506855/2598413