

SCOPP Monthly Bulletin

May 2009

Editorial

Sri Lanka has had a lot to celebrate this month. After an unwanted yet unavoidable battle with the LTTE, the Security Forces reached their objective. The Tiger leaders were eliminated, and the Government announced the reunification of the island and the end of the conventional war against the LTTE. This was a long time in coming, and the entire country has breathed a sigh of relief.

The defeat of the LTTE has brought with it many good things. Most importantly, it has released the Tamil population of the North from their suffering. Not only have these people escaped the dangers of the fighting of recent days, but they can look forward now to lives without the blight of forced recruitment, illegal taxation and the other restrictions on their basic freedoms that were daily occurrences in the Vanni under the LTTE.

It has also presented us with an invaluable opportunity. Without the burden of a conflict to fight, the Government can focus its full attention on the practical work that needs to be done to solve the problems we face. It will mean greater resources for this work too, of course.

The Peace Secretariat is happy to report in this bulletin on a number of different initiatives that have begun already. These range from the promotion of sports for young people, through the provision of artificial limbs for the disabled, to the enhancement of English teaching capacities. Each project, in its own way, contributes both to an immediate need and to the building of a lasting peace in Sri Lanka.

One of the key elements of all of these endeavours is the efforts being made to bring together actors from different backgrounds. This means encouraging the private sector to work with NGOs, the Government and the Security Forces. That this approach is proving successful bodes well for the future.

Amidst these blue skies, there remains a black cloud. Some governments and the organisations they fund have continued to spread false claims about the number of civilian deaths that were incurred to get to this point. Given the importance of this debate, we also carry an article looking at where these allegations came from and why they have no basis in fact. Sri Lanka can only hope that its detractors will read and digest, to return with a more considered opinion of our situation and a greater determination to help with all the work that needs to be done from now on.

Pictured opposite is a handful of the many young children who have escaped from the LTTE and are being looked after in the Vavuniya welfare centres. Thanks to a volunteer teacher, they have begun work, and they must be hoping that the Government will be allowed to do the same, without interference or distraction. Their futures are at stake. Now that the LTTE is gone, they can start to think of such things.



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About this bulletin

The Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process, otherwise known as SCOPP, is the governmental body set up to build confidence in a negotiated settlement to the conflict in Sri Lanka. This is the fourth issue of the SCOPP Monthly, launched to keep interested parties informed about the work done by the institution.

More information can be found on our website at www.peaceinsrilanka.org.

Peace through better communication

English teacher training programme



The Government has long regarded language as perhaps the most important challenge in building a lasting peace in Sri Lanka. While efforts continue to be made to encourage the learning of Sinhala and Tamil, English is a clear priority. As H.E. the President emphasised on announcing 2009 as the Year of English and IT, promoting English is not only a means of empowering rural youth by giving them new opportunities to find employment, but also a way of bridging the divide between the Tamil and Sinhala communities.

To make the best use of the limited resources available, the Government is focusing on the establishment of a handful of Cities of Excellence, on which the surrounding regions can draw. Jaffna has been declared the first of these, demonstrating the Government's commitment to develop the North.

Updating the skills and knowledge of English teachers in these Cities of Excellence is a key target, and the Peace Secretariat was instrumental in organising a pilot training session in May. Thirty people from Jaffna, Batticaloa, Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa attended a three week programme in Colombo. They went back to their home districts to pass on the knowledge gained. Further workshops involving English teachers from other districts will be held when funds become available.

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The Ministry of Education ran the workshop, assisted by the Presidential Initiative on English and IT, with the coordination of the Peace Secretariat. It was also supported by the US Embassy in Colombo and the Sri Lanka National Commission for UNESCO.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Minister of Education Hon. Susil Premajayantha said, 'At a time when Sri Lanka is on the brink of commencing a new chapter in her history, it is vital to provide our young generation with the encouragement and motivation they need to look ahead into their future and rightfully hope for better days.' Quoting Nelson Mandela, he

concluded, 'Education is the most powerful weapon that can be used to change the world.'

Prof. Rajiva Wijesinha, Secretary General of the Peace Secretariat, explained that the current problems in Sri Lanka were partly due to a failure to empower the regions. Marginalisation had led to economic stagnation, he said. This could be solved, he proposed, by developing an educated populace capable of taking advantage of the new opportunities, which meant facility in communication, particularly in a worldwide language such as English.

Sunimal Fernando, advisor to H.E. the President and Coordinator of the Presidential Task Force on English and IT, recalled the days of his youth: 'Few if any Sinhala students could speak Tamil, nor could the Tamil students converse in Sinhala. But there was so much English in the schools and in the wider community that people were able to communicate across their ethnic and cultural borders in English, developing lasting bonds of understanding, solidarity and mutual support.'

Summarising the need for English as a bridge language, he said, 'Interaction is the key to respect and understanding, to peace and harmony. And language is the key to interaction.'

Before this, I hadn't had an opportunity to meet fellow teachers from places like Batticaloa and Jaffna. One of the best things about the programme was that we got a chance to eat together, stay together and also compare notes.

The workshop focused on imparting two particular sets of skills to the participants. First, the participants were exposed to methods of teaching in which students take a more active role. Whereas most traditional approaches involve knowledge flowing only from teacher to pupil, modern teaching promotes exchange between students. Teachers are seen as facilitators, and the main priority is interaction.

Secondly, the programme showed the teachers innovative ways of engaging with students, to get them interested in learning and enthusiastic about their participation in the classroom. This is a question of making the classroom more closely resemble the world.

Reactions to the workshop were consistently positive. A Batticaloa attendee said that it had made him realise the importance of helping children to be active in class. He said, 'Previously, you just set scenes for them. The focus was always on the lesson to be taught. But here, creating attention in the children, positive feedback on their use of the new language, and interaction between the pupils was emphasised.'

A lady teacher from the Polonnaruwa district explained how she had been impressed by the exercises used to improve writing, particularly ones that used pictures to build students' vocabulary. She said that she was looking forward to applying the exercises in her own classroom.

The participants also spoke enthusiastically about the friendships they had developed in the workshop. A lady from Anuradhapura said, 'Before I came here, I hadn't had an opportunity to meet or interact with fellow teachers from places like Batticaloa and Jaffna. One of the best things about the programme was that we got a chance to eat together, stay together and also compare notes.'

A Jaffna teacher concurred, 'We have begun to realise the value of networking with teachers from other districts, so that now if we run into a problem, say, a lack of some resource in our schools, we can see if we can obtain that resource from friends outside.'

The Charge d'Affaires of the US Embassy in Colombo, James R. Moore, held a reception in honour of the participants at his residence during the workshop. He thanked and congratulated the teachers, and expressed his fervent hope that the project would go on to fulfill its larger and ultimate goal, that of being a conduit for peace in Sri Lanka. He reiterated the US Embassy's good wishes and continued support for the programme.

The Hon. V. Anandasangaree was the chief guest at the closing ceremony. He thanked and congratulated the participants, saying, 'I hope the training you had will help you to mould decent citizens in the parts of the country where you live.' Jeff Anderson, Director of Cultural and Educational Affairs at the US Embassy, said, 'Though this particular training session has reached its completion, I don't see it as an end but as a beginning, and we are eager to participate in the next steps of the programme.'

This workshop is just one of the efforts being made by the Government to improve the quality of English teaching, after many years of neglect. It is hoped that the focus placed on this work during the Year of English and IT will kickstart a process that will eventually present young people throughout the country with new opportunities and hope for their future.



Peace through sports

Cricket camp in Jaffna

Recognising that sports are of particular importance to young people, the Peace Secretariat has initiated a number of innovative projects under the banner of 'Peace Through Sports'. To promote integration and unity, a particular focus has been put on the organisation of events that bring together players from the different regions of Sri Lanka, while supporting the development of sports and associated infrastructure in conflict affected regions.

Businesses have responded enthusiastically, and we are happy to report on an ongoing initiative being sponsored by Coca Cola, with the support of the international public relations agency Ogilvy Outreach.

The 'Cricket Pathway' aims to identify the best cricketing talents from around the country, by holding a series of training camps in each district. The best young cricketers will be invited for a joint training camp later this year, scheduled to be held in

Colombo, at which a number will be picked to train with the national squad.

Seventy five boys took part in one of the first training camps, organised by the Security Forces at St. John's College in Jaffna. It was conducted by former Sri Lanka captain Aravinda De Silva, with top Australian coach Steve Nell and his team. Principal of St. John's College, Rev. Jameson Gnanaponrajah, provided accommodation at the school premises.

The training camp received high praise from the people of Jaffna, as they had never before had an opportunity to expose their children to top level professional coaching. The boys underwent extensive training in batting, bowling, fielding and fitness, under the guidance of Aravinda De Silva and the national coaches. Meanwhile, Steve Nell's team used sophisticated visual monitoring equipment to scientifically identify the most promising cricketers.



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One of the highlights of the training camp was the 20-20 match on the final day. After that, seven players were selected to participate in the final stages of the 'Cricket Pathway'.

Jaffna Town Commandant Brigadier Ruwan Kulatunga, the chief organiser of the event, said, 'I am extremely happy that we achieved this with lots of praise from the people of Jaffna. I personally believe that if we could help the next generation in Jaffna through such programmes, it will definitely help towards building national unity, while bridging the North and South of Sri Lanka.' Rev. Fr. Saundaranayagam, the Bishop of Jaffna, added, 'This is one of the first attempts made in recent times to build bridges between the North and South and we hope more events will follow in the near future where the talent of the Jaffna youth can be highlighted.'

Following the training camp, the Sri Lanka Cricket Board under the leadership of D.S. De Silva, on the instruction of H.E. the President, invested Rs. 9 million to develop cricket in Jaffna by providing cricket equipment, including 18 matting pitches for schools. This is reflective of the Government's commitment to ensuring that the same facilities available to young people in the South are available to Jaffna youth.

In addition to cricket, the Peace Secretariat hopes to promote a range of other sports in Jaffna in the coming months. Basketball, badminton and athletics have been identified as priorities already.

Support for the disabled

Mobile clinic in Trincomalee

One of the key tasks for the Peace Secretariat in the post-conflict era will be to encourage initiatives that bring disparate actors together. A recent collaboration to supply prosthetic limbs to disabled people in the Eastern Province has demonstrated that even simple welfare projects can be organised in a manner that promotes reconciliation.

The Jaipur Foot Programme, administered by the Colombo Friend in Need Society, has been supporting disabled people across Sri Lanka for years. Last month, the Peace Secretariat helped to take its mobile clinic to Trincomalee, in partnership with the 22 Division Army headquarters, with funding from the Rotary Club of Capital City.

Around 65 people from Trincomalee town and surrounding areas like Thambalagamawa, Kuchchaweli, Kinniya and Nilaweli attended over three days. Of them, 40 people were given prosthetic limbs. A handful of serious cases were referred to the Colombo residential clinic and will be brought to Colombo soon. Another mobile clinic is to be held in Trincomalee town to serve a further 130 people, followed by similar efforts in Batticaloa, Ampara and the Northern Province.

Most of the beneficiaries were fishermen, farmers and small traders, and many remarked that their new limb would improve their livelihood opportunities, helping them to work more and earn more for their families. Eight former soldiers received prosthetic limbs too.

Despite the mobile clinic being held in a Buddhist temple, people of various ethnicities and religions attended, and

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everyone requiring a prosthetic limb received one without discrimination. Even former LTTE cadres were beneficiaries. The Army Civil Affairs Officer Col. Senarath Kohona said, 'Their past is irrelevant. They may have been with the LTTE before, but this is a humanitarian cause now.' This approach has characterised the Security Forces, who have fought ruthless enemies, but moved swiftly to relief work as soon as the danger was over, as in their guidance of so many of the weak and disabled who escaped the LTTE in recent days.

The photograph shows the cross-section of people who attended the mobile clinic. On the left is Mr. Jibris, a Muslim fisherman from Kuchchaweli, who lost his limb in an LTTE pressure mine in 1994, at just 18 years of age. Next to him is V. Premachandran, a fisherman now, but a former LTTE cadre,



who lost his limb in IPKF mortar fire in Sampalthivu in 1989, aged 19. On the right is a Sinhala fish trader, Sarath Perera, who came from Galle to Trincomalee when he was 7 years of age. He speaks fluent Tamil, and communicated well with the other Tamil-speaking attendees. He lost his limb to an LTTE land mine when driving past an Army camp in Trincomalee.

All three interacted very cordially, sharing their stories of how they lost their limbs, as well as discussing another topic that brought them together, their common livelihood of fishing.

To ensure the effectiveness, accountability and transparency of the initiative, a follow-up meeting of all the partners was held. It reviewed the effectiveness of the mobile clinic, and formulated a strategy to ensure the continuity of the project. Moreover, the list of beneficiaries was passed on to the individuals who contributed to Rotary for the project. These donors could then visit and develop a relationship with the people they helped, and perhaps assist them in improving their livelihoods and the welfare of their families.

The Peace Secretariat facilitated the project from conceptualisation onwards, while the Civil Affairs Unit at Trincomalee, led by Col. Kohona, helped to make the practical arrangements. It was remarkable to see these Army officers using a very different set of skills to those we saw them demonstrate on the battlefield. The Colombo Friend in Need Society conducted the mobile clinic, taking expert orthopaedic doctors, prosthetists and workshop staff, as well as materials and machinery to make custom-built prosthetic limbs for the people who attended. A total of Rs. 400,000 was donated by the Rotary Club of Capital City to fund the project.

In bringing together such different groups of people to collaborate on welfare activities, the project serves as a model for others working in the conflict affected regions. The Peace Secretariat has been encouraging this kind of partnership approach in all fields.

Foolishness or cunning?

We are told that the UN claims that about 7,000 civilians have been killed in fighting between the Security Forces and the LTTE over the last few months. It is also claimed that 16,700 have been wounded, 'according to a UN document given to the Associated Press by a senior diplomat'.

This leak is the third in a series that has led to a state of denial by the UN. They claim that they are not responsible for any leaks, though they have still not reported to us on an investigation that was promised. More pertinently, they have gone on record as saying that they know their figures are not reliable. Certainly, when this process first began, we sat down the head of security in Colombo who had produced the figures and found that many of them were based on extrapolation that had no rational basis.

The process began with a figure in February of around 2,000 killed and over 4,000 wounded. Then, in March, when the High Commissioner for Human Rights got into the ring, it was 2,800 killed and more than 7,000 injured. By April it was nearly 6,500 civilians killed and 14,000 wounded. The latest figure suggests agreement on a ratio of just over two to one with regard to wounded and killed, which makes sense in such conflict situations, even if the figures themselves are suspect.

Implicit in all this bandying about of figures is the assumption that the Government is responsible for all these deaths and also the injuries. Yet, obviously, there are three things that need to be verified before we can start the process of apportioning blame, blame that will stick given the small size of Sri Lanka, as opposed to blame that wafts away on a breezy apology, which we have seen in more brutal conflicts in recent days. First, are the figures accurate? Second, are they all attributable to the Security Forces, or might some of them have been inflicted by the LTTE? Third, are all those who died or were injured civilians?

In dealing with these questions we see a remarkable lack of logic and thought on the part of those determined to jump on a bandwagon to bash the Sri Lankan state. Let's try then to introduce some basic rationality into the discussion.

As we have seen, there were more than twice as many injured as died through this year. However there seems to be no trace of the large figure now alleged for the last four months of 16,700. The ICRC brought off several shiploads of injured from the conflict zone from the beginning of February until the beginning of May, but of the 13,826 they conveyed only 5,499 were patients. Obviously the ICRC would not have brought out over 8,000 bystanders if there were injured waiting to come out. This



suggests that the total number of deaths would in fact have been about 2,500, possibly 3,000 at most.

Second, we have hard evidence of the LTTE both firing deliberately on civilians, and also not caring much about collateral damage. It is now forgotten that, in the last seven months of 2008, when the Security Forces swept through half the North, and took Kilinochchi too after bitter battles, the total of civilian deaths alleged even by Tamilnet was just 78. It was only after that, when the LTTE had achieved its aim of corralling civilians together, that wanton destruction of civilians began. Before that, clearly, as had happened in the liberation of the East, the Government had been able to ensure maintenance of its principle of minimal civilian casualties.

The first date on which massive numbers of civilian deaths was alleged was January 26th, just after the Government declared the first safe zone. Though initially when firing into the zone started the UN thought Government was responsible, UN Resident Coordinator Neil Buhne sent a text message at the end of the day to say that he believed most of the firing came from the LTTE. There is also the testimony of the Bishop of Jaffna who, while asking the Government to extend the safe zone (which he would scarce have done if he believed the Government were firing into it), said that he would also ask the LTTE to withdraw from the zone its own heavy weapons that were endangering the people.

Apart from such collateral damage, there were many occasions on which the LTTE fired on civilians trying to get away, using heavy weapons too as was seen in the pictures of the tank being deployed desperately on April 20th when the first large exodus began. And of course there is the testimony of so many in the camps, mentioned so often to visitors, forgotten by the sensationalist media.

Finally, it must be clear to any thinking person that a great number of those who died would be LTTE fighters. When TamilNet propagated claims of civilian deaths, they never gave numbers of cadres who had died. Nor did they give figures of the wounded. Yet, obviously, many of those who engaged the Security Forces for so long, especially in the area around Puthukudiyirippu, would have been hardcore combatants.

And to the number of those we have to add combatants who had been recently recruited. UNICEF has reported on these, UNDP has complained that the children of its staff were recruited, but no one has extrapolated from this the obvious fact that many civilians were forced to bear arms, and therefore were legitimate targets for the Security Forces. This had been made

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clear early on, when the Army Commander explained why the LTTE still continued to fight ferociously even though it had lost so many people in battle in 2008 - youngsters in civilian clothes, obviously scarcely trained but carrying weapons, were found in profusion in bunkers along with regular cadres. This indeed heightens the guilt of those international agencies who refused, almost till the end of 2008, to condemn the LTTE for holding people hostage - they knew, as they had known for years, about forced conscription, but there was no public criticism of this, as the UN Resident Coordinator admitted, when he acknowledged that UN awareness that the LTTE was recruiting one person per family was not publicised in 2007 (and when it was raised to 2 in 2008, there was an even more deafening silence).

So it is obvious that a number of those who died in the last few months were combatants, bearing arms, having been forced into this by LTTE brutality and the ostensibly benign silence of the international agencies who had known what was happening, but said nothing. And, more pertinently, a number of those injured too would have been combatants.

And yet, there are no LTTE combatants amongst the injured, not at least in any of the reports that are filed, the accusations that are made. All those injured, the more than 5,000 who were brought out by the ICRC, the rest who surrendered, are described as civilians. This is not unacceptable since, in the process of rehabilitation that Government plans, it is important not to hold their recruitment against any of these youngsters.

When TamilNet propagated claims of civilian deaths, they never gave numbers of cadres who had died. Yet, obviously, many of those who engaged the Army for so long would have been hardcore combatants.

But it must be recognised also that, when they were bearing arms against us, they were legitimate objects of attack.

When we see that in theory there are no LTTE wounded amongst those we are now caring for, we can understand how preposterous it is to assume that there were no LTTE dead either. Except at the very end, when after we had managed to rescue almost all the civilians the hardcore cadres fought and died, there were no accounts of LTTE dead in the propaganda that was churned out between January and April. But to believe that would be as ridiculous as to believe that all those injured, whom we are now treating in Government hospitals, were civilians who were victims of assaults by the Security Forces.

But people believe what they want to believe. Sensible extrapolation from the casualties who are now with us suggests that some of them must be combatants, that many were wounded by LTTE action, and the number of dead must be less than the now oft tossed about figure that will soon become gospel. Certainly the number of civilian dead must be very much less, and amongst them those killed by collateral damage as opposed to the deliberate targeting of them by the LTTE as they tried to escape must be minimal.

We have rescued 290,000, more than the figure of 250,000 that was being bandied about most often. We avoided the bloodbath that was predicted, that the LTTE tried to precipitate, especially on May 10th. We have confounded the world in dealing firmly with terrorism while preserving the lives of most of the civilians who were the most oppressed victims of terror.

For this evidently we must suffer. But this is a small price to pay for what we have achieved. And we can but hope that, in time, those who with more power inflict greater suffering for the sake of what they see as the greater good will learn to try to emulate our actions. They must learn in the end to deal with terrorism while remembering that the people they are rescuing from terror are not to be 'othered', but to be treated as fellow human beings and thus fellow citizens in our common humanity.



Peace through empowerment

Puttalam self-help programme



The Peace Secretariat has been working for some time to focus attention on the plight of the IDPs who were chased away from the Northern Province by the LTTE in its ethnic cleansing operations of the 1990s. An estimated 116,000 IDPs live in 121 welfare centres in Puttalam, and the Government has been supporting them while hoping that resettlement in their Jaffna, Mullaitivu and Mannar homes will be possible in the days to come.

While some of the IDPs have managed to find decent employment, with for example around 50% of the teachers in Puttalam schools coming from the welfare centres, plus a handful of youth born and bred there having attended university and qualified as doctors and other professionals, 80% of the IDPs do not have a permanent livelihood. They eke out a hand to mouth existence through manual labour. As a result, upgrading the temporary huts that they were given on arrival in Puttalam to build decent homes is largely beyond the reach of the IDPs, and they have to simply make do.

An initiative coordinated by the Peace Secretariat has been assisting the IDPs to access credit from State banks. Some 150 women, organised to work together in groups of ten, have received Rs. 50,000 each to develop their livelihoods, and further applications are being processed now.

Meanwhile, the Peace Secretariat has brought in groups with experience of helping people to organise themselves to make the most of limited resources. In May, the South Asia Perspective Network Association ran a workshop for 30 leaders of these women's associations at the Norochcholai Aailnkuda Muslim Vidyalyaya in Kalpitiya. The Peace Secretariat coordinated the programme, with assistance from government officials in the area.

Mr Wickremarachchi of the South Asia Perspective Network Association, accompanied by three community leaders from the Ranna village in which his organisation has been working for some years, explained their approach. The Ranna village, situated in the Southern Province, has developed a model for transforming a deprived area into a prosperous community.

Mr Wickremarachchi explained by using examples how the IDPs in Puttalam, even though they did not have land, could model themselves along the lines of the Ranna village to secure their future.

This is based primarily on the idea of cutting out the middlemen and loan sharks who customarily sap much of the profits of small businesses, and of encouraging community organisation where the owners of the small businesses pool their resources so as to meet each others' needs.

Mr Wickremarachchi explained by using examples how the IDPs in Puttalam, even though they did not have land, could model themselves along the lines of the Ranna village to secure their future. The approach used could best be described as self-help, he said.

In particular, the value of forming women's associations was stressed. The South Asia Perspectives Network Association has been working in other countries of the region as well as Sri Lanka, and a film showing how a group of Nepalese women pooled their savings to build up a fund to provide loans to members was screened, demonstrating the progress that they had been able to make as a result. This triggered an intense discussion among the participants of the workshop as to how they could follow the example. As a first step, they decided that the existing women's organisations should be brought together under an umbrella group.

Various other initiatives were proposed at the workshop, and the South Asia Perspectives Network Association agreed to support and find the necessary funds to implement these. The Peace Secretariat will continue to facilitate.