



SCOPP Newsletter



January / February 2007

Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process (SCOPP)

Volume 1 Issue 6

In This Issue

- President visits Vakarai and Sampur
- Child soldier recruitment
- Ship Carrying essential food to Jaffna attacked by LTTE
- International maritime laws flouted-Jordanian Merchant vessel attacked by LTTE Sea Tigers
- LTTE kills Hindu priest who garlanded the President at Vakarai
- Security forces clears land-mines to resettle Vakarai civilians
- All ten nominations for the International Independent Group of Eminent Persons (IIGEP) received
- Ready to assist in Sri Lanka to defeat terrorism - UN Counter Terrorism Committee
- Humanitarian assistance to IDPs -update
- A third harbour for Jaffna
- Jaffna Library rises from the ashes

SCOPP Reports

- LTTE Engage in Act of Piracy – Against Jordanian Merchant Vessel MV FARAH III
- Ship Carrying essential food to Jaffna attacked by the LTTE
- Government Security forces Liberate civilians in Vakarai

Other Reports

- 'Sri Lanka's on Going Efforts to Develop Conflict Affected Regions Through Public and Private Sector Participation'- Address made by Hon. Rohitha Bogollagama, Minister of Foreign Affairs

President visits Vakarai and Sampur

President Mahinda Rajapaksa paid a special visit to Vakarai and Sampur areas on February 03, 2006 making a personal assessment of the conditions of the people in these areas liberated from the LTTE, the conditions of the security forces there, and future development work to be undertaken. The President said he was committed to defeat terrorism and bring about a political solution, and at the same time build an environment in which all communities could live freely.



Child soldier recruitment

Reviewing the situation as it exists today, the steady recruitment of children by the LTTE has remained unabated since 1983.

Many commitments given by the LTTE leadership over the years to persons such as Olara Otunnu, the first Special Rapporteur on children affected by conflict, Carol Bellamy, the former Executive Director of UNICEF and many international delegations including local UN staff remain unfulfilled. This raises the issue of how difficult it is to hold non-state parties unlike a government, responsible and accountable for rights violations.



Refer p.4 for full report

Ship Carrying essential food to Jaffna attacked

LTTE Sea Tigers attempted on Sunday afternoon (January 21, 2007) to ram a cargo vessel 'City of Liverpool' which was anchored just outside the Kankasanthurai (KKS) harbour after unloading essential food supplies in Jaffna. The attack by the LTTE using suicide cadres damaged the hull of the cargo vessel. Several Navy sailors who were on this vessel providing protection to the civilian crew sustained injuries.



International Maritime Laws flouted-Jordanian Merchant Vessel attacked by LTTE Sea Tigers

On December 23, 2006 around 0300 hours in the morning, LTTE Sea Tiger cadres forcibly boarded a Jordanian merchant vessel MV FARAH III that was laying off the coast off Mullaitivu after developing engine trouble, by firing gun shots and then proceeded to forcibly detach the anchor, raid the ship and force the 25 member crew off the vessel. The foreign crew members were forcibly detained by the LTTE.

Speaking to members of the security forces at Vakarai and Sampur, President Rajapaksa said he had visited them on the eve of the 59th anniversary of independence to express his thanks for the sacrifices they had made in liberating the people of the East from the clutches of terrorism under which they had suffered for many years.

Replying to questions from the foreign media the President said the contribution by the international community towards resolving this crisis was very important and it was their responsibility to bring pressure on the LTTE to agree to a negotiated settlement. He said the terrorists who destroyed the environment in the East under which all communities could live in peace, would not be allowed to raise its head in these areas again, and there would be speedy development in these areas to restore normalcy to the lives of the people.

Civilians who met the President at Vakarai thanked him for having freed them from the clutches of terrorists, and said their wish was to live and carry out their work in freedom.

LTTE kills the Hindu priest who garlanded the President at Vakarai



Head priest of the Pulliar Hindu Temple at Sandiveli in Batticaloa, who garlanded President Mahinda Rajapaksa during his recent visit to Vakarai has been brutally assassinated by a group of LTTE terrorists on February 7, 2007. It is recorded that the group of terrorists have forcibly dragged the Head Priest, Chellaiah Kurakkal Parameshvaram out of his residence and shot him dead. His body which was lying in a ditch behind the government school at Sandiveli has been found by the civilians at around 8.35 p.m. According to civilian sources the slain priest was threatened by the LTTE since he had actively cooperated with the security forces in helping the displaced people from Vakarai.

Security forces clears landmines to resettle Vakarai civilians

Brigadier R.M.D. Ratnayake, General Officer Commanding of the 23 Division said they had removed 4,000 landmines from several locations in Vakarai, Palachchenai, Kadiraveli and Verugal. "The LTTE has laid landmines indiscriminately without any concern for international law or civility," he said

"Our aim is to resettle some 45,000 IDPs in the East who had been held by the LTTE as human shields, removing landmines can take two to three weeks. A UNCHR NGO will assist, Government authorities had visited Vakarai and are working to restore the damaged infrastructure," Brigadier Ratnayake said.

Director General of the Task Force for Resettlement, M.A.C. Mohideen said the first group of IDPs will be resettled close to their homes initially in about another week or two.

"We have been successful in carrying out a programme to resettle those displaced in Mutur and Sampur due to LTTE activities," Mohideen said. "The Ministry of Resettlement will assess damages caused to individual homes through Grama Niladharis and Divisional Secretariats and arrange to pay compensation to them to build their houses," he added.

(Child Soldier Report continued from cover page)

The UNICEF database on child recruitment established in 2002 mentions a total of 6,006 child combatants with 60% being boys and the rest girls. This includes those under 18 year and those recruited when they were under 18 years. 1,784 are documented as being released. According to UNICEF, the figures in the database represent only one third of the actual number. They mention that the age of recruitment has increased from 14 in 2001 to 16 in 2006. It is unclear if all the children in conflict areas have birth certificates to verify their ages. There is no mention of verification procedures carried out on data being collected. With the escalation of violence in 2006, incoming reports indicate increased recruitment not only of children under 18 years, but also of youth in the 18-24 year age category. Media reports indicate massive recruitment and abductions in the past few months. This would stem from indicators of a massive counterstrike against the government forces for which the LTTE is bound to seek additional cadres.

Fear and intimidation create a huge barrier for families living in conflict affected areas to articulate their antagonism to child recruitment by the LTTE and report incidents. There could also be feelings that the Tamil cause would be jeopardized if there is such open condemnation by the public. In LTTE dominated areas particularly the "uncleared" areas government supported systems and institutions are weakened by LTTE intimidation. There are some who have had the courage to report to UNICEF offices while others probably suffer in silence.

Sri Lanka is one of the few developing countries which has provided free health care and education from primary to tertiary levels in all parts of Sri Lanka for several decades since Independence. This has and still includes areas affected by the conflict in the North and East. Unfortunately, the very same children who survive infancy and early childhood and who are given immunization and protected from diseases end in battle as child combatants and sacrifice their young lives on behalf of the LTTE. In fact, the LTTE uses the same educational institutions established by the government to provide free education for recruitment purposes. They have infiltrated schools, intimidated teachers and principals and conduct indoctrination classes for young students.

They capitalize on young minds which can easily be convinced about a "cause", and can be motivated to violence when it is portrayed as glorious. The LTTE talk of "voluntary" recruitment although it is a rights violation. Such recruitment is done deliberate and undertaken with cold calculation to sway young minds towards violence. The indoctrination goes even further to motivate young combatants to devalue their lives by getting them to wear a cyanide capsule and be ready to commit suicide if captured. Thus, death is glorified. The LTTE is also known to visit schools with 'A' Level classes, and put pressure on the principals to release students for first aid and defence training. The training is undertaken by LTTE cadres for the recruitment of students as combatants. Some parents fear to send children to school because of such recruitment efforts. However, it is also well known that high ranking Tiger leaders send their children abroad for studies. The Tamil Diaspora which funds the LTTE and the "eelam cause" do not seem to realize that a whole generation of young Tamil youth is being destroyed.

The UNICEF database since 2006 also includes underage recruitment by the Karuna faction of the LTTE. A total of 235 children are recorded, mostly boys and mostly in the eastern province.

The need today is for priority to be given to implement the recommendations made in the 20 December report of the UN Secretary General on Children Affected by the Armed Conflict in Sri Lanka. These include targeted measures against the LTTE political and military leadership, promoting conformity with the Action Plan for children and release of children to families, and the prevention of recruitment of children by the Karuna faction of the LTTE. Underpinning all such recommendations is the need to establish accuracy and reliability of information being collected particularly in relation to abductions and child recruitment. While it is easier to hold state parties accountable with regard to rights violations, doing so with non-state parties such as the LTTE is more difficult. This is an area where UN entities and the international community should take a firm stand working in partnership with the government. The Security Council Resolution provides a valuable opportunity to do so. The government of Sri Lanka has, and continues to stand firm in its commitment to eliminate child recruitment.

All ten nominations for the International Independent Group of Eminent Persons (IIGEP) received

Ten nominations for the observer group have now been received for the International Independent Group of Eminent Persons (IIGEP) to observe and monitor the functions of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights, public proceedings are to commence on February 12, 2007.

Nominations have been received from the United States, Britain, Netherlands, India, Japan, the European Union, Australia, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Canada.

The mandate of the IIGEP has been developed in consultation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and with representatives of the countries nominating members to the IIGEP. Members of the IIGEP have been vested with a wide mandate to observe all investigations and inquiries conducted by and on behalf of the Commission of Inquiry. They will have access to information, material and witnesses in a manner parallel to such access Commissioners have.

The IIGEP will have the liberty of making public announcements containing their views regarding the manner in which the Commission of Inquiry is conducting its investigations and inquiries. They also have the capacity to provide advice when such advice is sought by the Commission. The IIGEP will have the liberty of commenting on the findings of the Commission of Inquiry and on the follow-up action taken by the relevant competent authorities based on recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry. Members of the IIGEP will have an Assistant each of their choice. The IIGEP will have a separate Secretariat and its own Secretarial Support Unit.

Ready to assist in Sri Lanka to defeat terrorism - UN Counter Terrorism Committee

The Executive Directorate of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee has expressed its resolve to defeat the scourge of terrorism following the recent bomb attacks on civilian buses in Sri Lanka.

This is said by Mr. Javier Ruperez, Assistant Secretary-General, UN Counter - Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) in a letter to Mr. Prasad Kariyawasam, Sri Lanka's Permanent Representative in the UN, following last weekend's bomb attacks.

The letter of January 8, 2007 states:

"I am writing to express my deepest condolences to you and the people of Sri Lanka for the terrorist attacks which occurred over the weekend.

The killing of more than 20 individuals in the two incidents near Colombo certainly provokes a sense of anger but it also serves to strengthen our resolve to defeat this scourge.

I wish to assure you that we at the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) continue to stand ready to assist your country in any way. Please accept Excellency, the assurance of my highest consideration."

A third harbour for Jaffna

With the closure of the A-9 road at Muhumalai to LTTE terror attacks, essential food items for the people of Jaffna were ferried by ships with the facilitation of the Sri Lanka Navy. Continuous supplies were ferried under the "Jathika Saviya" programme with the guidance of the Senior Advisor to the President Mr. Basil Rajapakse and the Commissioner of Essential Services.

In order to avoid the delays in loading and unloading of goods at the two harbours in the Jaffna peninsula, a third harbour, the Mailaddi port which was damaged in the tsunami has been identified and developed to handle cargo operations.

The development of a third harbour for the Jaffna peninsular surfaced subsequent to an inquiry made by the Senior Advisor to the President, Mr. Basil Rajapakse from the Commander of the Navy, Vice Admiral, Wasantha Karannagoda.

Following the Navy Commander's proposal to develop the Mailaddi port, the Sri Lanka Navy was tasked to carry out its restoration work. The Navy has completed the restoration work of the Mailaddi harbour within a short period of 45 days. The Mailaddi port is in operations currently.

A third port for the Jaffna peninsular in addition to the Point Pedro and Kankasanthurai harbours will boost the Jaffna economy. According to a recommendation by Mr. Basil Rajapaksa, the Ministry of Nation Building has granted the Sri Lanka Navy Rs. 3 mn for the restoration of the Mailaddi port.

Civil engineers of the Navy along with sailors completed work on the Jetty and other restoration work in the harbour. Having received the support of Jaffna civilians to dredge the harbour mouth, the Navy was able to complete work of the Mailaddi port by 2nd February 2006.

Since the inauguration of the Mailaddi port, cargo vessel MV HIND M has unloaded 31, 90 and 125 tons of essential food items and goods on 2nd, 3rd and 04th February 2007 respectively. The Government Agent of Jaffna with the assistance of the Army had made arrangements to dispatch these food items by lorries for distribution among the people.

The Government believes that the addition of the Mailaddi port to the peninsula's infrastructure will further ensure the wellbeing of the people of Jaffna. On previous accounts, attempts by the LTTE to discredit the Government that the people of Jaffna are dying of starvation proved futile in the eyes of the international community due to extensive measures taken by the Government and the Security forces to ensure uninterrupted supplies to the peninsula.



Humanitarian Assistance to IDPs -Update

Inter-Ministerial Committee

An Inter - Ministerial Committee has been established to facilitate humanitarian assistance to IDPs, monitor and to address issues pertaining to obstacles encountered by International relief organizations, INGOs/NGOs. The Committee is chaired by Hon Mahinda Samarasinghe, Minister of Human Rights and Disaster Management

The GOSL has facilitated INGOs/NGOs personnel to access un-cleared areas of Mullativu, Kilinochchi, Vavuniya and Mannar districts to engage in development activities.

A Consultative Committee on Humanitarian Assistance (CCHA)

A Consultative Committee on Humanitarian Assistance (CCHA) has also been established in order to facilitate humanitarian assistance to people living in Mullativu, Kilinochchi and un-cleared areas of Mannar and Vavuniya districts and to regularly monitor developments. The Committee is chaired by Hon Mahinda Samarasinghe, Minister of Human Rights and Disaster Management.

A system is being set up to provide compensation to people displaced by conflict and enable their expeditious resettlement.

Humanitarian Assistance - Issues

During the past several months the Government has sought the assistance of the ICRC to escort supply vessels to the Jaffna peninsula. However, the LTTE's refusal to guarantee their safety has prevented the ICRC from escorting the vessels.

Government has made an urgent request to the LTTE to allow over 4000 private traders in Jaffna peninsula to sell food and other goods without intimidation and obstruction by the LTTE. However, the LTTE has not responded positively to the request. Due to threats of from the LTTE private traders in Jaffna have refused to engage in the trading activities.

Bilateral Donor Group (BDG) in their latest Report (January 2007) have called on the LTTE to reverse the climate of manipulation and oppression of civilians (e.g. prevention of private trading in Jaffna)

Government's Commitment to People of Jaffna

To facilitate passenger transport the GoSL has deployed 01 charter vessel (City of Trinco) from Jaffna to Trincomalee and vice versa.

The Ministry of Defence took a decision to give clearance to domestic flights to resume operations to Jaffna. Consequently Daya Aviation(1st September, 2006), Aero Lanka(4th September, 2006) and Expo Aviation (September 25, 2006) have resumed flight operations.

The GoSL in consultation with GA Jaffna, Security Forces and representatives of the fishing organization have relaxed restrictions placed on fishing in the lagoons of Vadamarachchi

Essential Food Supplies:

Required Essential Monthly Food Supply -12000 MT

Food Supply between mid - August 2006 to end of Jan 2007 using the sea route 68,000 MT, 12, 000 MT per month

Food Supply between January - June 2006 using the A9 route less than 25, 000 MT (for six months) 4, 000 MT per month

Thereby tonnage has doubled via the sea route

Situation in Mullativu, Kilinochchi districts, and un-cleared areas of Vavuniya and Mannar districts

Essential supplies including medicine, building materials and fertilizer are being dispatched on a regular basis.

The Government Agents of the Mullativu, Kilinochchi, Vavuniya and Mannar districts have confirmed that there are no shortages of essential supplies in these districts. Essential supplies are being transported through the A9 route.

Government's Humanitarian effort in Vakarai

The government has taken adequate measures incurring considerable cost and effort to ensure the availability of the essential humanitarian needs to IDPs who have fled LTTE captivity.

Last week the entry of the Government security forces into Vakarai provided the opportunity for thousands of civilians to flee into Government relief centres away from forced detention by the LTTE.

An estimated 34,300 civilians are now in Government maintained relief centres in the Batticaloa District. They are provided with adequate food, clothing, medicine and shelter.

Attacks to Civilian Vessels that supply food to Jaffna – acts of piracy

In the past LTTE suicide boats have attacked and sunk supply ships and have attacked passenger vessels

On 9 November, 2006 a passenger vessel was attacked by suicide boats. On Sunday January 21, 2007 LTTE Sea Tigers attempted to ram a cargo vessel 'City of Liverpool' which was anchored just outside the Kankasanthurai (KKS) harbour after unloading essential food supplies in Jaffna. The attack by the LTTE using suicide cadres damaged the hull of the cargo vessel.

The 'City of Liverpool' was one of the ships that left Colombo on January 18 carrying 7675 Metric Tons of essential food to Jaffna.

The LTTE have threatened private traders, preventing them from distributing goods brought in by the government and thereby preventing the distribution of goods in the peninsula

Jaffna library rises from the ashes

The Jaffna Library, first set up in 1933 by Mr. K. M. Chellappah in his house, elected Mr. Isaac Thambiah, who was the High Court Judge of Jaffna at that time as its first Chairman.

Having seen many a shift in premises between 1934 to 1936, a final repository was built near the Jaffna Town Hall.

Initially, the library had only 844 books and about 30 newspapers. However, by the 1970's, it became one of South Asia's finest libraries, that was home to more than 97,000 titles and rare and old manuscripts, including those written on palm leaves and stored in fragrant sandalwood boxes, miniature editions of the "Ramayana" epic from the children's section and extinct Tamil language newspapers. But, an unfortunate act of ethnic vandalism in 1981, reduced the Jaffna library to ashes.

However, the government of Sri Lanka has since spent 1 million US dollars to reconstruct the library infrastructure in the same architectural design, but larger outlay. UNESCO has provided technical assistance under a Ford Foundation Grant of \$ US 200,000 to build capacities for the good functioning of the Jaffna Library During the years 2004-2005 under the UNESCO/Ford Foundation Project, over 20 personnel have been provided training in the use of computers, the knowledge of the English Language and in Library Management. More than 30 computers have been installed, with a Cyber room comprising 10 computers, along with wifi connectivity for the complex and a nearly 100,000 titles and Video collections that have been acquired and or donated.

Television and Audio/Video facilities have also been provided, as also a mobile library bus, which is expected to target readership in the greater penninsula.

Today, well over 200 Visitors/Students use the library facilities each day, that has also, provisions for a canteen, conferencing and stage performances.

Truly a great leap forward into the information and knowledge society, to a population that has undergone great hardships, during two decades or more of violence, perpetrated by extremists.



Source: Sri Lanka National Commission for UNESCO

LTTE Engage in Act of Piracy – Against Jordanian Merchant Vessel MV FARAH III, Anchored Off the Coast of Mullaittivu due to Engine Failure



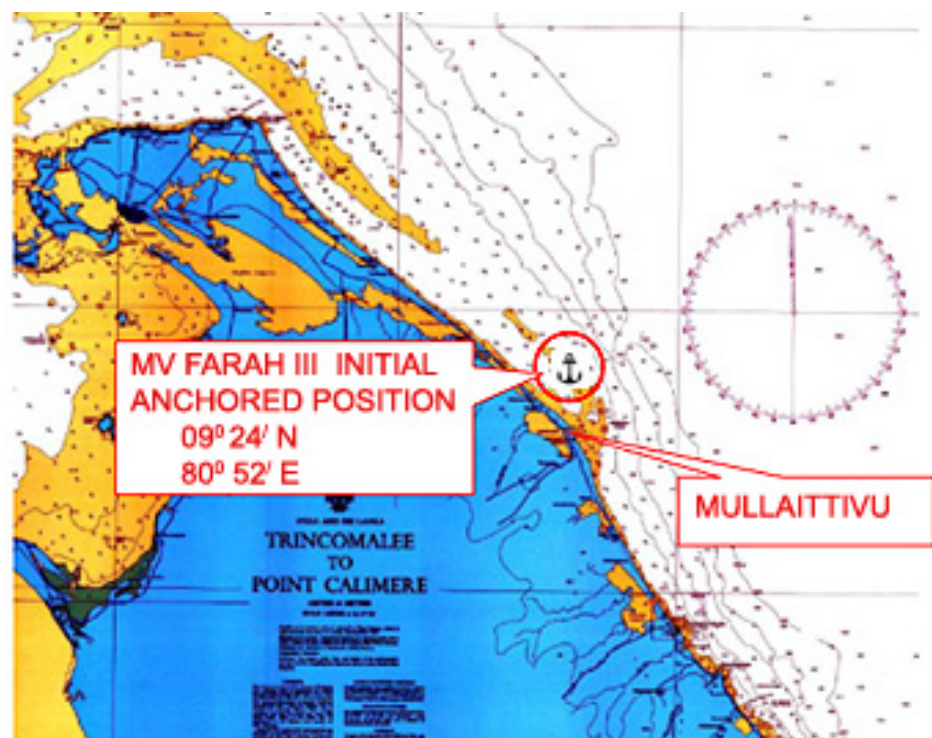
Captain Ramaz Abdul Jabar and Bosun Mohamed Abdul Aziz Ahmed Alsiturman of the Jordanian merchant vessel MV FARAH 111 confirmed at a meeting with the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), in Colombo, in the presence of Officials from the Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process (SCOPP) and the Sri Lanka Navy, that armed LTTE representatives had forcibly boarded the vessel after firing gun shots into the air around 0300 hours on the morning of 23 December 2006 and proceeded to force the weighing of the anchor, raid the ship and force the 25 member crew off the vessel, firing further gun shots.

The LTTE had first surrounded the ship with six small military type vessels, each vessel was fitted with three outer board motors and guns. They boarded the ship and attempted to explode the anchor cable. When they failed to do this they demanded that the anchor be pulled up and began forcibly removing all the communication equipment on the ship, thereby depriving the crew of any facility of further communications. They then ordered the crew to board the LTTE vessels.

The ship FARAH 111 carrying a cargo of 14,000 MT of rice from Kakinada in India was proceeding to Durban in South Africa, when it had developed engine defects and requested its local agent on 20/12/06 to arrange for the assistance of a Tug boat from Colombo. The vessel was first detected by the Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) drifting close to the coast off Mullaittivu later on in the day. On 21/12/06 the vessel was advised to anchor once she reached a suitable depth for anchoring as she was in danger of being run -aground on the Mullaittivu shoal in the prevailing rough sea conditions. The ship was safely anchored at 09° 24' N, 080° 52' E (8.2 nautical miles NNE off Mullaittivu). She was in contact with the local shipping agent and the principals and was awaiting towing assistance that had been requested from Colombo.

The Captain reiterated that the ship and the crew had been safely anchored and were not in danger until the LTTE had arrived and forced them to remove the anchor and abandon the ship. This had caused the vessel to drift. The latest information received by the SLN indicate that the vessel has now drifted to position 09° 19.2' N, 080° 47.8' E (approximately 1600 meters from land) and run aground.

It is clear that the LTTE had engaged in a blatant act of piracy.



Farah 111 initial anchored position

Following is an agreed summary of conclusions derived from the meeting.

- The Ship had run into engine problems and was safely anchored at 09° 24' N, 080° 52' E (8.2 nautical miles NNE off Mullaittivu) on 21/12/06. The ship was in contact with the local shipping agent and the principals and was awaiting towing assistance that had been requested from Colombo
- Around 0300 hours on 23/12/06 the LTTE approached the ship in 5 or 6 "military type" vessels.
- They fired into the air initially and then forcibly boarded the Ship, at no time were they invited by the Captain or crew to board the ship.
- The LTTE did not ask the Captain and his crew either initially or at any point of time as to whether they were in distress or as to whether they needed assistance.
- The Captain activated a general alert and distress message/signal on the ship, indicating that an incident of piracy/armed attack was taking place.
- The message was received at 0348 hours at the Maritime Rescue Coordinating Centre in Falmouth UK.
- The Captain also set off the alarm on the ship.
- The LTTE proceeded to forcibly remove all communication equipment in the vessel. By the removal of communication equipment from the vessel the LTTE, deprived the crew from communicating with their contacts and any other sources of assistance.
- Thereafter the LTTE **ordered** the crew to get into LTTE boats and the crew had to follow the orders. The LTTE fired a couple of rounds in the air to speed up the move.
- The boats were fitted with 3 X OBMs each. The boats took off at high speed causing the crew to suffer injuries and some members vomited.
- It was reiterated that the crew and the vessel were totally safe when the vessel was anchored and there was no danger until LTTE removed the anchor and caused the vessel to drift.
- The LTTE did not indicate to the Captain or crew at any point of time, that they were on a rescue mission nor did they indicate any other intention. They carried out their activities without the consent of the Captain and the crew.
- The question as to "what the LTTE was going to do with the cargo and the abandoned vessel" was raised by the Captain. The LTTE had not given any specific answer.
- The LTTE forcibly removed all the ships instruments and equipment such as computers/fax machines etc as well as some personal effects of the crew such as laptop computers, mobile phones etc, when they visited the ship a second time with the captain and 6 crew members later that day.
- The ship had a full load of rice, 14,000 Metric Tons at the time the Captain and crew were forced by the LTTE to abandon the ship.
- The ship had been anchored within the "Territorial Waters" of Sri Lanka.

The ship was safely anchored at 09° 24' N, 080° 52' E (8.2 nautical miles NNE off Mullaitivu). When the LTTE set a drift the vessel by detaching the anchor the vessel drifted to a position close to one nautical mile off the coast at Mullaitivu. There after, the LTTE started looting the cargo of the vessel. The photographs appended below illustrate in vivid detail the subsequent happenings to the stranded vessel.



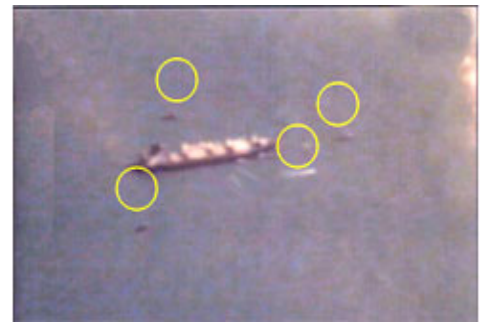
Jordanian merchant vessel MV Farah III



MV Farah III laying one nautical mile off The Coast of Mullaitivu



Goods on Jordanian merchant vessel MV Farah III



LTTE Sea Tigers approaching the Jordanian merchant vessel Farah III



LTTE Opening stocks on the ship



LTTE looting Jordanian Vessel Farah III



LTTE Sea Tigers transporting stocks looted from Jordanian merchant vessel Farah III

Ship Carrying essential food to Jaffna Attacked by LTTE

LTTE continues with acts of piracy



LTTE Sea Tigers attempted on Sunday afternoon (January 21, 2007) to ram a cargo vessel 'City of Liverpool' which was anchored just outside the Kankasanthurai (KKS) harbour after unloading essential food supplies in Jaffna. This attack led to a clash between the Sea Tigers and the Navy. The attack by the LTTE using suicide cadres damaged the hull of the cargo vessel. Several Navy sailors who were on this vessel providing protection to the civilian crew sustained injuries. The damaged ship has been towed to the KKS harbour.

LTTE's attitude to the people of Jaffna

LTTE created a humanitarian issue globally pointing out that the people in Jaffna were suffering due to a shortage of essential food items in the peninsula. The 'City of Liverpool' was one of the ships that was carrying 7675 Metric Tons of essential food from Colombo to Jaffna.

In attacking civilian vessels engaged in humanitarian missions to assist the people of Jaffna, LTTE has again demonstrated its cynicism and heartless disregard for the welfare of the Tamil civilians on behalf of whom the LTTE claims to be the sole representative. In addition their bluff in calling for the opening of the A9 route on humanitarian grounds, is clearly shown. The LTTE would rather see people of Jaffna starve in order to score propaganda and military 'victories' against the State of Sri Lanka.

LTTE's continued acts of piracy

With this attack LTTE has once again demonstrated its readiness to resort to blatant acts of sea piracy by targeting civilian vessels. Just a month ago i.e. on December 23, 2006 around 0300 hours in the morning, LTTE Sea Tiger cadres forcibly boarded a Jordanian merchant vessel MV FARAH 111 that was lying off the coast off Mullaittivu after developing engine trouble, by firing gun shots and then proceeded to forcibly detach the anchor, raid the ship and force the 25 member crew off the vessel. The foreign crew members were forcibly detained by the LTTE.

Violation of CFA by LTTE

This unprovoked attack by the LTTE on the civilian vessel 'City of Liverpool', is another gross violation of the Ceasefire Agreement. LTTE has no valid claims to the Territorial waters of Sri Lanka, which belongs exclusively to the State of Sri Lanka. This position is upheld in the Ceasefire Agreement and by the SLMM.

Government's commitment to the people of Jaffna

A total tonnage in excess of 60, 000 Metric Tons of essential food supplies has been sent to Jaffna from Colombo since mid - August, 2006. This works out to an average of 12, 000 Metric Tons per month which is in line with the assessment made by international observers of the quantum of essential food required for the people of Jaffna per month.

Notwithstanding LTTE obduracy, the Government of Sri Lanka on its part will continue to do its utmost to address the plight of the people of the Jaffna Peninsula and ameliorate their living conditions, without any reservation.



The Government security forces wrested control of Vakarai from the LTTE on Naunary 19 liberating thousands of civilians forcibly held by the LTTE. An estimated 33,000 civilians have fled LTTE captivity in Vakarai and entered Government controlled areas in the Batticaloa District during the last few weeks. This number includes the 3000 civilians who arrived today in Mankerni from Vakarai.

LTTE creates IDPs

The majority of these 33,000 civilians are internally displaced people (IDPs) who were forced to flee Muttur, Sampur and Kantale in the Trincomalee district with the commencement of LTTE attacks on the Security forces in Muttur in early August, 2006. When the clashes shifted from Muttur to Sampur these civilians were forced by the LTTE to move down south to Verugal and then to Vakarai. In Vakarai, there was ample evidence that the LTTE were using these civilians as human shields to prevent the Government from engaging in defensive military operations. On several occasions the LTTE had impeded the transportation of food, medicine and other essential items to IDPs in uncleared areas. Even attempts by the Government to send relief items to IDPs through the ICRC had failed due to LTTE obstruction.

IDPs risk life to escape LTTE captivity

Harsh conditions coupled with tyrannical control made these civilians risk their lives to escape from LTTE captivity, despite threats and intimidation. They sought refuge in Government controlled areas in the Batticaloa District.

Government assists IDPs

The Government is committed to protect the IDPs in uncleared areas. At the height of the IDP crisis in Vakarai, the Commissioner - General of Essential Services in co-operation with several international relief organizations and INGOs / NGOs dispatched on November 29, 2006, a convoy comprising 84 Lorries containing essential supplies including medicine to the civilians in the Vakarai area. The convoy originally comprised 117 lorries but 33 of these lorries were prevented entry into the Vakarai area due to deliberate obstruction and shelling by the LTTE. The LTTE also used the cover of the food convoy to advance their defence lines. The convoy carried three months supply of essential food items to an estimated 35,000 civilians held captive by the LTTE in Vakarai.

50 IDP Welfare Centres

The Government has also taken adequate measures incurring considerable cost and effort to ensure the availability of the essential humanitarian needs to IDPs who have fled LTTE captivity. They have been placed in 50 IDP Welfare Centres situated in three locations i.e. in Batticaloa, Valaichchenai and Sittandi. These IDP Centres are administered by the Government. Seven new welfare sites have been opened in the Batticaloa District to cater to 1500 families comprising 6000 persons who were originally lodged in Schools. They are being provided with adequate food, clothing and shelter.

LTTE attacks on Army continues

On October 6, 2006 the LTTE launched an attack on a Sri Lanka Army detachment at Mankerni killing 13 and wounding 28 soldiers. Since then the LTTE has launched regular attacks on Government Security forces from the areas north of Mankerni often using artillery and mortars. Up to date a total of 45 soldiers have been killed and more than 195 soldiers have been wounded due to these attacks..

Safe Zones for IDPs

GOSL has repeatedly proposed the establishment of a safe zone(s) for IDPs in Vakarai in recognition of an urgent need to move the IDPs away from areas of conflict and military installations to designated safe areas. However, the LTTE has repeatedly rejected the proposal of the Government.

Co - operation with international relief organizations

The Government's Security forces are co-operating with international relief organizations, guaranteeing their safety in order to facilitate the evacuation of civilians from conflict affected areas.

Sri Lanka's on Going Efforts to Develop Conflict Affected Regions Through Public and Private Sector Participation



By Hon. Rohitha Bogollagama
Minister of Foreign Affairs

(Fmr. Minister of Enterprise Development and Investment Promotion Sri Lanka)

Hon. Rohitha Bogollagama addressed an International Conference focused on the theme 'Investing in Peace: Spurring Private Involvement in Post Conflict Peace building' and held at the Wilton Park Conference Hall, Sussex, UK between 11 January - 13 January, 2007. This Conference was organized in co-operation with the German Federal Foreign Office and supported by the Global Public Policy Institute.

Introduction

The current conflict in Sri Lanka has affected mostly the Northern and Eastern Regions of the country over little less than a quarter century in varying degrees while imposing a heavy cost on the economy in respect to both resources wasted and lost opportunities. It has cost the loss of over 65, 000 lives, injuries, disappearances and displacement of people, and destruction of social and economic infrastructure.

President Mahinda Rajapaksa has released a blueprint entitled ' Mahinda Chintanaya: Vision for A New Sri Lanka - Discussion Paper on Development Framework 2006 - 2016' setting out his Vision and Framework for the future development of the country over a ten year period (2006 -2016). It contains both a policy framework and objectives, and a strategy for the development of conflict affected Districts, which are primarily in the North and East of Sri Lanka.

The overall objective of the Government of Sri Lanka is to develop the North and East as a hospitable and attractive place and establish an environment where people will have freedom to live and pursue livelihoods of their choice; restore peace and ethnic harmony leading to rapid social and economic development.

The discussion paper spells out Short, Medium and Long term objectives which include:

- a) Relief, Re-settlement, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation aimed at displaced persons host communities,
- b) Establishment of basic physical infrastructure and restoration of services to the communities
- c) Establishment of sound governance administration and service delivery arrangements, and
- d) Laying the groundwork for socio - economic development , rehabilitation of infrastructure and delivery of other services.

The long term goals are aimed at raising the standard of living of all the affected parties.

In Sections dealing with the Governmental strategy for the Revival of the North and Eastern Regions, Tables have been incorporated in this document clearly setting out the Priority Areas, Targets and Programmes. Though much of the development of infrastructure and services sector will be by way of public expenditure, there is nevertheless identification of programmes for private sector participation e.g. opening of new garment factories, establishment of an agricultural export zone, Trincomalee Ocean City Development Project (includes Investment and Tourism Zones).

Development and Infrastructure Facilities in the North and the East - the Government's Seminal Role

Contrary to widely held misconceptions, the administrative machinery and infrastructure facilities in LTTE controlled areas is funded and maintained substantially by the Government. In addition, the Government meets an overwhelmingly substantial part of the humanitarian and infrastructural needs of the civilian population living in the North and the East, including the LTTE controlled areas.

For instance :

State hospitals and State run healthcare centres provide a totally free service - both preventative and curative and are funded by the Government. The State meets the recurrent costs of Doctors' salaries, drugs, dressings and maintenance of hospitals. In the North and East, there are over 53 Hospital institutions with more than 4427 hospital beds providing free curative healthcare and an estimated 1848 functioning state funded schools with over 700,000 students.

The State funded education system including schools, non-formal education institutions, technical colleges, provides free education. The salaries of teachers, administrative, clerical and elementary staff are met by state funds.

The district and sub-district administrative offices functioning in areas under LTTE control are funded by the Government - this includes the salaries of Government Agents, Divisional Secretaries, Grama Niladaris and administrative staff.

The Government provides these services and amenities from revenue collected from the public in the rest of the country as the revenue from the North and the East is less than 0.1% of the total revenue.

In addition, a significant number of small, medium and large scale projects have been completed with the assistance of the international community, including the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank in many cases with funds borrowed by the Government. These projects cover a wide variety of sectors.

In the latest figures on ongoing projects in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, which include both tsunami and non-tsunami projects, there has been a total allocation of US\$ 1283.10 Million comprising loans US\$ 673.8 Million and grants US \$ 609.3 Million.

State Investment in Development and Infrastructure Activities in Northern and Eastern Provinces (2002-2006) - A Summary

Education

- Schools - Rs.3.721 Billion
- Universities - Rs.792 Million
- Skills Development, Vocational and Technical Education - Rs.1.044 Billion

Healthcare

- Healthcare - Rs.6.020 Billion

Livelihood Assistance

- Relief and Livelihood Assistance - Rs.14.735 Billion development.

Infrastructure Development

- Roads and Bridges (Rs.38.674 Billion)
- Housing (Rs.1.582 Billion)
- Electricity (Rs.692 Million)
- Water Supply and Sanitation (Rs.21 Billion)
- Ports (Rs.460 Million)
- Telecommunication (Rs.600 Million)
- Irrigation (Rs.1.635 Billion)
- Institutional and Community Development (Rs.124 Million)
- Agriculture (Rs.133 Million)
- Fisheries (Rs.1.5 Billion)
- Livestock (Rs.60 Million)

Relief, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction - 2002-2006

- 1) North East Housing Reconstruction Programme - World Bank US\$ 75 M (Rs.7500 M)
- 2) North East Coastal Community Development Project - ADB US\$ 22 M (Rs.2200 M)
- 3) North East Irrigated Agriculture Project II - World Bank US\$ 64 M (Rs.6400 M)
- 4) North East Road Rehabilitation Programme - EU
- 5) North East Community Restoration and Development Project Loan - ADB US\$ 180 M (Rs.18000 M)
- 6) Rehabilitation of Bridges in the North-East - UK
- 7) North East Emergency Rehabilitation Programme WB/EU
- 8) Conflict Affected Area Rehabilitation Programme - ADB US\$ 80 M (Rs.8000 M)
- 9) National Protection and Durable Solution for IDP's - UNHCR
- 10) Jaffna Water Conservation and Environmental Management Project - GTZ
- 11) Mannar District Rehabilitation and Reconstruction through Community Approach Project - JICA
- 12) UNDP Technical Assistance Programme - UNDP
- 13) Food Security and Reconciliation in Batticaloa District - GTZ
- 14) Agricultural and Rural Development in Trincomalee Districts - JICA
- 15) Recovery Programme for People Affected by North East conflict - WB
- 16) Emergency Rehabilitation for the Community in the Vanni and the East - JICA
- 17) Water Supply Scheme in Mannar District
- 18) Northern Rehabilitation Project NRP-GTZ
- 19) Pro Poor Economic Advancement and Community Enhancement Project - JBIC
- 20) Secondary Education Modernization Project - ADB

21) Teacher Education and Teacher Development Project - WB

22) General Education Project II - WB

More than 50% of the foreign funded projects are based on loans granted by international institutions and foreign governments to the Government of Sri Lanka, which is then required to repay these loans. It is the Government that bears the burden of funding the development of the North and the East and repaying these borrowed funds.

However, studies reveal that approximately 10-20% of these funds are siphoned off by the LTTE. It is largely from these illegally acquired funds that the LTTE maintains its name-board structures and logistics, trains its child soldiers and places its armed cadres, both men and women, in a perpetual state of war.

Risk Management Strategies in Conflict Affected Areas

Government explores Guarantee Facility to encourage private investment in the North and East

Private Investment has played a vital role in the development of the South of Sri Lanka and it is hoped that it will contribute to the development of the conflict affected areas of the country. The Government is making every effort to attract both foreign and local private capital into the conflict affected areas to spread the economic benefits of private investment. The Government is discussing with the Multi-lateral Investment Guaranty Agency (MIGA) of the World Bank Group in developing and implementing an initiative to provide risk insurance cover for private investors in these areas.

Government's policy in encouraging private investment in the North and East, is aimed at creating job opportunities for the youth in these Regions which would in turn enable them to realise life's higher aspirations - a better life for them and their families. Development of the North and East offers an alternative pathway to lives which are otherwise marred by violence and destruction. Development is a sine qua non for peace.

Bank reluctance to fund business enterprises in high risk conflict affected areas, could to some extent be overcome by establishing industrial zones coupled with incentives for investors to be attracted to invest in conflict affected areas, such as:

- Tax Holidays and Special Duty concessions
- Revival of industries that were originally established in these areas like cement
- Special duty concessions from USA & UK for items exported from these areas, and
- Bank loans for industries to be established in the North and East.

A survey would be conducted to assess demand for the investment guaranty facility. It is only upon assessment of a proper demand by investors for the investment guaranty facility that further steps would be taken to concretize the proposal.

The Government is committed to promote an investment drive in the North and East not only among local investors but also among the diaspora which is already investing substantially in Colombo. Diaspora funds could play a critical role in changing the lives of the people in the North and the East.

Trincomalee Special Economic Zone

President Mahinda Rajapaksa has identified Trincomalee as being in the forefront of the country's future economic development and under his leadership Trincomalee will be transformed into a vibrant industrial base and usher in a new economic dimension to Sri Lanka

The groundbreaking Foundation stone laying ceremony of the proposed Trincomalee Special Economic Zone was held on January 7, 2007 under the patronage of the Minister of Enterprise Development and Investment Promotion, Mr. Rohitha Bogollagama.

The site at Kappalthurai is considered to be the most attractive location to establish a special economic zone in Sri Lanka with the Trincomalee harbour recognized internationally as one of the best ports in the world. This is one of the 12 Special Economic Zones proposed in the 2006 Budget.

Cabinet approval was granted on February 16, 2006 to gazette approximately an extent of 675 kilometers for this project.

Substantial foreign investment is expected for the Special Economic Zone due to Trincomalee's geographical location. It should attract a large number of investors. The main objective of the Trincomalee Special Economic Zone is to create an entrepreneurial spirit by encouraging long term investment and creating a new industrial culture by promoting public and private partnerships.

It will also be a leading provider of port related products and services to international markets by maximizing the potentials of the Trincomalee Port and its environs as well as to make the most convenient location in the East as a destination of investment.

Infrastructure Development Plans which will spur Investment in Post - Conflict Sri Lanka

- 12 New Special Economic Zones (Work of 3 Projects has already commenced)
- Colombo South Harbour Development (Total Project cost to exceed \$ 1.0b - Expressions of Interest called for)
- Oil Exploration in the Mannar Basin, off the North Western Coast of Sri Lanka. (Expressions of Interest to be called for in May '07)
- 300 MW Power Plant in North Western Sri Lanka (Work on the Project has commenced)
- 300 MW Power Plant in the Trincomalee District in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka (MOU signed between the Ceylon Electricity Board and National Thermal Power Corp. of India).
- Construction of a new Port and Tank farm in the Hambantota district of the Southern Province of Sri Lanka. (Contract has been awarded)
- Oil Refinery to be set up in the Hambantota District of the Southern Province of Sri Lanka. (Project has been approved).
- 2 nd International Airport at Weerawila in the Southern Province of Sri Lanka. (Ground breaking ceremony held in December 2006).
- Southern Highway (Work on the Project commenced in 2003)
- Colombo - Kandy (Central Province), Highway, and the Colombo - Katunayake (Airport) Highway projects, will be offered for proposals shortly.

Peace Process

GENEVA TALKS

GENEVA 1 - CEASEFIRE TALKS - 22-23 FEBRUARY 2006

The Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) remains committed to a negotiated settlement despite the refusal by the LTTE to return for talks for a long period of time. Talks were finally resumed in Geneva in February 2006 when the GOSL and the LTTE met for talks on the Ceasefire Agreement. The GOSL made it clear in its opening statement that the Ceasefire Agreement entered into by the GOSL of that time and the LTTE in February 2002 was "*contrary to the constitution and law of the country, however as certain benefits had flowed to the people as a result the GOSL would preserve the ceasefire*". The ceasefire was considered "*a first step to arrive at a negotiated settlement to the ongoing conflict and we propose to rectify certain grave anomalies arising from the agreement*".

Discussions were held on issues related to the ceasefire, including the concerns of the Muslim, Sinhalese and Tamil civilians. Issues regarding the welfare of children in the North and East, including the recruitment of children were discussed. The GOSL emphasized that it remained committed to achieving substantial and sustainable economic development in all parts of the country, and had invested heavily in provincial development.

At the end of the talks both the GOSL and the LTTE expressed a commitment to respecting and upholding the Ceasefire Agreement and to "*taking all necessary measures to ensure that there will be no intimidation, acts of violence, abductions or killings*". It was agreed that the next round of talks would be held in Geneva on 19-21 April 2006. However the LTTE used numerous excuses to avoid returning to the round of talks in Geneva in April and launched a violent campaign against the security forces and civilians which culminated with widespread attacks on Government positions in Trincomalee and Jaffna in August 2006 which were unsuccessful.

The Government continued to work towards a negotiated settlement and agreed to meet with the LTTE in Oslo in June 2006 to discuss issues relating to the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM). The meeting was called by Norway to ensure safety and security of the Scandinavian truce monitoring mission after the May 11 Sea Tiger bid to target a ship carrying 710 security forces personnel returning to the Jaffna peninsula.

However having being brought to Oslo the LTTE delegation refused to talk to the Government delegation again on the pretext that they wanted a GOSL Minister to be part of the delegation.

GENEVA 11 - OCTOBER 28-29 2006

Despite an escalation of violence by the LTTE after the Geneva 1 talks in February 2006, the GOSL continued to remain committed to a negotiated settlement to the ongoing conflict and open to having talks with the LTTE. The GOSL met with the LTTE in Geneva 28-29 October 2006 for resumed talks.

The deliberations proceeded in a cordial and business like manner until lunch on the second day. Both the GOSL and the LTTE stated that it was preferable to progress into discussions on solving issues rather than spending time laying blame for past deeds.

The GOSL delegation reiterated that it was, consistent with the Mahinda Chintanaya, committed to moving the country forward to the realization of a just and honorable peace; a peace based on the principles of a true democracy and human rights and that it hoped to achieve this through negotiation and dialogue.

At the outset the GOSL stated that its focus would be on humanitarian issues and the political processes with a view to achieving a sustainable solution to the conflict. It also suggested that agreement could be reached on issues for future discussions.

On the first day of the talks, the following matters were discussed: humanitarian issues, political processes, the de-escalation of violence, democracy and political pluralism. Both parties discussed these issues in detail for the first time. The serious problems confronting the Muslim community in the East and the North due to the LTTE's actions of ethnic cleansing were also highlighted by the GOSL delegation.

In its presentation the GOSL delegation explained the Government's development programme for the North and the East and, the initiatives undertaken to address the concerns of the minorities in particular the Tamil minority. Details of the steps taken to ensure that adequate supplies were sent to the Jaffna peninsula were explained carefully. The Government took the view that the needs of the Jaffna peninsula could be met more efficiently and cost effectively by using the sea route.

Significantly the LTTE made no attempt to contradict these details, however in the face of the government presentation, merely shifted its initial contention that the supply of food and medical supplies to Jaffna was a major humanitarian concern to a new position claiming that family reunions and freedom of movement for people in the peninsula was the paramount concern. They accordingly claimed that the re-opening of the A9 was critical. It is also significant to note that no complaints were raised in relation to deprivations or shortages of supplies in LTTE dominated areas such as Mullativu and Killinochi.

The Government explained that the A9 route was open at the Omani check point enabling supplies to move freely into Killinochi and Mullativu. The GOSL emphasized that it was only the entry/exit point at Muhamalai in the Jaffna peninsula that was temporarily closed following the massive attack by the LTTE on GOSL positions on 11 August 2006. This attack had completely destroyed the infrastructure that had been constructed by the GOSL to facilitate the movement of people and supplies through the check point. Since then the Government had moved essential supplies by ship and air and also deployed vessels to facilitate civilian movements to and from the peninsula. The Government reiterated that Muhamalai could not be opened immediately due to concerns for the safety of civilians using the entry/exit point and in the interests of national security; the necessity for this position was even more evident in light of LTTE artillery attacks in this area even as the talks proceeded. (these have continued since then).

The GOSL emphasized the fact that the closure of the entry/exit point at Muhamalai was a temporary measure and that the Government had every intention of opening. However good faith must be demonstrated by the LTTE by refraining from launching attacks in the area and undertaking offensive actions.

The GOSL urged the LTTE to cooperate in the short term in order that essential supplies could be transported to Jaffna. The Government was facing numerous difficulties in hiring private vessels for this purpose as the safety of ships could not be ensured due to the threat of LTTE attacks. Both the ICRC and the UN had as a consequence of requests from

the GOSL confirmed they were willing to flag the supply ships if the LTTE gave the necessary security guarantees. The LTTE continues to refuse to give such assurances.

The Government clearly stated that it was willing to place the opening of the A9 route at Muhamali as a priority item on the agenda at the next round of talks. This it was felt would also allow for time to test the bona fides of the LTTE assurance that it would adhere 100% to the CFA. It would also give the opportunity to engage in strengthening the confidence building process started at these talks further. The Government intended to re-open Muhamali and make the A9 a modern highway which will link Jaffna to the south of the country and facilitate development and ensure a better life for the people of the area. It is of paramount importance that the illegal activities resorted to by the LTTE along the highway such as the collection of illegal levies, extortion and the forced training of children comes to an end.

It is unfortunate that the LTTE focused on the re-opening of the A9 route to the exclusion of alternate options to address the humanitarian needs of Jaffna and with total disregard to the urgent needs of the Jaffna people. The duplicity of the LTTE is evident in this illogical stance and also in light of the fact that they are continuing daily attacks on the Muhamali exit/entry point.

It is also regrettable that the LTTE which came to the talks on an unconditional basis decided suddenly after the first session of the second day of the talks to impose a precondition on future talks by demanding that the GOSL delegation concede to opening the Muhamali entry/exit point immediately.

Nevertheless the GOSL considers the deliberations they had with the LTTE on political issues encouraging. The LTTE were briefed on the government initiatives in relation to the rapidly evolving Southern consensus and on constitutional reforms leading to a political settlement to the conflict. The LTTE responded positively to these endeavors and in particular welcomed the MOU signed between the SLFP and the UNP. The GOSL delegation was able to confirm that they would be in a position to place at least an interim report from the APRC at the next round of talks.

The Government stated that it saw the deliberations as a positive start and confirmed it was ready to continue the dialogue unconditionally at any future dates. Since these talks the Government offered various alternate options for humanitarian relief to alleviate the problems of the people in the Jaffna peninsula. On 11 November, 2006 an alternate route was proposed through Pooneryn to carry supplies via the land route and on 20 November the Government offered to open the entry/exit point at Muhamalai on a one off basis to enable a convoy with urgent supplies of food to the peninsula. The LTTE turned down both proposals and refused to cooperate with the Government.

CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

Since April 2006 His Excellency the President and the Government of Sri Lanka have taken a number of initiatives to facilitate the realization of a negotiated settlement to resolve the national problem. Significant among them is the endeavor to develop constitutional proposals with broad support. The main aim has been to find an indigenous solution that will lead to an end to the decades of internal strife, and enable all people to live in dignity and peace in Sri Lanka.

The Government has emphasized the fact that the task of finding a political solution to the national question requires a multi-party effort and an inclusive approach. In this context the formation of the All Party Representative Committee (APRC) and the appointment of a Panel of Experts on 11 July is a significant step in reaching a national consensus among political parties.

At the Inaugural Meeting of the APRC and the Panel of Experts on 11 July 2006, The President H.E. Mr. Mahinda Rajapakse stated, *"any solution needs to be as a matter of urgency allow people to take charge of their own destiny. This has been tried out successfully in many parts of the world. There are many examples from around the world that we may study as we evolve a truly Sri Lankan constitutional framework including our immediate neighbor India. Improving the lives of Sri Lankans all over the country is our ambition. Improving the lives of the impoverished in the North and the East is a priority."*

The mandate given to the APRC and the Panel of Experts as outlined in the President's speech is to *"fashion creative options that satisfy the minimum expectations...as well as provide a comprehensive approach to the resolution of the national question"*. He wished them success *"in their collective endeavor in formulating a political and constitutional framework for the resolution of the national question"*.

The aim of the Government is to engage the various political parties discuss their different approaches and through their deliberations arrive at a broad framework that will generate consensus.

The APRC and the Panel of Experts have met on a regular weekly to bi-weekly basis and have confirmed that they have made significant progress in their deliberations. The Panel of Experts presented their preliminary reports to the APRC on 6 December 2006. The APRC is in the process of formulating a proposal to submit to the All Party Conference (APC).

Strengthening the political process, the Government initiated discussions with the main opposition party, the United National Party (UNP), on 15 September 2006 primarily to facilitate reaching political consensus in the South. Discussions were based on a 6-point common minimum national agenda put forward, consisting of: peace, good governance, electoral reform and social development. The two parties have signed an MOU on 23 October 2006. The UNP in the MOU extended its support to the government *"in its pursuit of a negotiated settlement to the on-going conflict while opposing terrorism in all its manifestations and upholding human rights"*. The strengthened political consensus in the South is a significant step in formulating a new constitutional framework for the resolution of the conflict and in particular one that will address the needs of the people in the North and the East. The UNP is now participating in the APRC deliberations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I wish to state that the current conflict though it has lasted for over a period of 23 years is unlikely to escalate into a state of 'total war and destruction'.

There are developments already taking place which provide hope and confidence that a peaceful settlement of this issue is close at hand. We are encouraged by the emerging Southern consensus and the deliberations taking place at the APRC. We are equally encouraged by the multiple voices in the Tamil community both within and outside Sri Lanka calling for a peaceful settlement without a division of the country.

On our part i.e. the Government of Sri Lanka, is committed to an accelerated development of the North and East as a matter of priority, utilizing both the public and private sectors, so that the people in these regions, Tamil, Muslim and Sinhalese can share in the fruits and benefits that result from economic development.

SCOPP Mandate

Coordinate the implementation of decisions of the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) on the Peace Process

Liaise with the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) and the Norwegian facilitators

Monitor the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) between the GOSL and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)

Provide research and logistical support to the GOSL delegation during political negotiations between the GOSL and the LTTE

Liaise with government ministries, institutions, armed forces and the Police, UN agencies, international humanitarian organizations and national and international NGOs on matters pertaining to the Peace Process

Monitor the free movement of people and goods to and from the uncleared areas

Communicate issues relating to the Peace Process to the national / international media and the public through its Communications Division

Provide logistical and technical support to the National Advisory Council on Peace and Reconciliation (NACPR)

For further information please contact us at:

The Communications Unit
Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process (SCOPP)
Level 10, West Tower
World Trade Centre
Bank of Ceylon Mawatha
Colombo 01.

Telephone: +94 (0) 11 5554471-2, 2394568

Fax: +94 (0) 11 5554473

Email: info@scopp.gov.lk

Website: www.peaceinsrilanka.lk