

Getting better

Editorial

There can have been few times in which Sri Lanka has come under so much scrutiny in the foreign media. The Times, for example, over the last few months alone has accused the Government both of making IDP centres too primitive, and then of making them so comfortable that, it is assumed, we will never let the residents go home.

The arguments behind this are specious at best. Keeping large numbers of people in camps is expensive, a fact that cannot escape the attention of a poor country like Sri Lanka, particularly as we struggle to cope with the effects of the global economic crisis. The idea that the Government wants to hold Tamils indefinitely, while Muslims and Sinhalese 'colonise' the North, is nothing less than absurd. Such behaviour would surely lead to an international response sufficient for terrorism to begin again. By contrast, the explanations that we have given, of the need for demining, security checks, reconstruction and so on, make a great deal more sense.

Such reporting concerning the IDP centres disturbingly often appears to have been fuelled by UN leaks. The UN has often been seen to be disdainful of Sri Lankan regulations - a case in point being UN constructed or supervised toilets, which sometimes last for only a few weeks before they overflow and spread disease. In some areas, these continue to be built, despite strong and repeated warnings that they fail to meet standards laid down by Sri Lankan law. For an agency such as the UN, apparently bent on philanthropy and peace, to regularly ignore Sri Lankan laws is in itself worrying, but many have sensed a disturbing interest for ensuring 'throw away camps' where facilities are of a purposefully poor quality to push the Government into speedy resettlement. This would lead to unscreened Tamil families being resettled into mined areas, often with just rubble for houses. It is exactly what the Government was criticised for in the East - being too hasty to resettle. It seems that, once again, the press cannot make up its mind.

Complaints are made about not being allowed into some of the IDP centres, such as Zone 0 in Menik Farm. Despite The Times recently describing it, in its own brand of cretinous aspersion, as 'the mysteriously named Zone 0', a short visit is all that is required to see that these are far and away the best camps yet built. Children bid their parents farewell from their large, practical, floored, steeple roofed houses, in crisp new uniforms, and go to attend lessons or vocational training courses. There is none of the serried ranks of white tents, with long queues for an incompetent water system under appallingly slow construction, as in Zone 2. They are preferable in every way to the IDP centres in which the UN has any responsibility.

Ultimately, the crux of such a debate is whether the Government is taking every reasonable step to resettle Tamils with safety, dignity and speed. If not, this must be addressed immediately, with The Times and others standing vindicated, but otherwise such sensationalism will have been a great hindrance to progress as well as a great injustice.

About this newsletter

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 sixth issue of the SCOPP Quarterly, 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.

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Sri Lanka rebuilds

Engaging the diaspora



Now that peace has finally dawned in Sri Lanka, the business community is stepping forward to make its contribution to the economic development of the country and the wellbeing of our people. Investing in small and medium sized enterprises in the conflict and poverty affected regions is one way of doing so, and it is good business too.

The Business for Peace Alliance launched a groundbreaking initiative in this field in June, with the first major conference to engage the Sri Lankan diaspora. Over five days, the BizPact Invest in Sri Lanka Symposium brought together around 30 Sri Lankan expatriates from America, the United Kingdom, Germany, Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates and Australia, with some 100 representatives of the Colombo business elite and 40 heads of Chambers of Commerce from around Sri Lanka to look at a range of carefully vetted projects of regional entrepreneurs.

The inaugural session provided the opportunity for the participants to introduce themselves and discuss the new situation in the country. Many of the expatriates hadn't been to Colombo for years, citing security worries. Samantha Rasquinho, a Sri Lankan living in Dubai and heading the Finance division of Emirates Airlines, commented from the panel on how much Sri Lanka had moved forward since her last visit. She added, 'I don't know how I am going to help you, but I am going to, in any way that I can.' Alex Wijesinghe, a Sri Lankan engineer based in California, congratulated H.E. the President, saying, 'Thank you for taking the first step towards uniting the country, by getting rid of a group that was holding us

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back all this time.' He had brought his entire family, he explained, because now there was no need to fear.

A number of interventions highlighted the potential benefits that working more closely with the Sri Lankan diaspora could bring for regional entrepreneurs. Jeremy Liyanage from Brisbane explained, 'They need to understand the business environment if they want to expand to foreign markets, and we can help with that. The Sri Lankan diaspora has expertise in many industries, and we are keen to get involved in mentoring fledgeling businesses as well as in providing funds for investment.' He proposed setting up an Office of Diaspora Affairs, possibly under the Ministry of Nation Building, to help organise support from abroad.

This was followed by an interactive session with Hon. Navin Dissanayake, Minister of Investment Promotion, who answered questions on policy issues.

Participants then headed out of Colombo for three days to visit some of the projects identified by the Business for Peace Alliance for support. Business plans for each had been prepared and audited by experts in advance.

Trincomalee was the most popular destination on offer. Stopping in Kurunegala on the way, the investors took the opportunity to meet local businessmen at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry. They were keen to promote the area as a tourism hotspot, given that it is ideally located between Colombo and the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

The Business for Peace Alliance had selected two projects for inspection in Trincomalee. The first was a construction project, involving a company with more than a decade of experience in the sector. With many of the people from Trincomalee who had moved abroad during the conflict now returning home, demand for accommodation is increasing at a tremendous rate. The company was seeking an investment of Rs. 15 million to build a luxury housing complex, anticipating a profit of Rs. 3.5 million.

The second project required an investment of Rs. 32 million, with an expected return of Rs. 4.8 million per year. This was to expand and upgrade the rice mill in Kinniya, to serve the large number of paddy farmers in the local area. An improved facility with proper stores would be able to produce rice of a better quality, which could then be marketed at a higher price, perhaps in Kandy and Colombo as well as in Trincomalee. The Kinniya rice mill has been in operation for many years, so it is also a solid investment prospect.

Having seen the two projects, the investors also met with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Trincomalee, to discuss other sectors with potential. Again, tourism was high on the agenda. Local businessmen pointed to the hot springs, the Koneshwaram Temple and the unpolluted beaches, which they emphasised set Trincomalee apart from the rest of the country. A representative of the Board of Investment participated in the meeting, drawing attention to the 1,600 acre plot of land that had been put aside by the Government to be utilised for investment purposes. They were able to visit this area later.

The investors were happy with the trip. Susan Joachim from Germany commented that it had been an excellent opportunity to get a firsthand understanding of the prevailing business climate in Trincomalee, so that she would be in a position to give accurate information to others. Emphasising the desire of the Sri Lankan diaspora to contribute to peace building efforts, she said, 'Expectations are high and the interest is real. The business of peace has now begun, now that the business of war is over.' A participant from the United Kingdom, Thana Sivashambu, concurred, expressing her interest in promoting Sri Lankan exports. The visit to Trincomalee had been particularly beneficial in linking her with the Chambers of Commerce, giving access to so many people engaged in various fields, she added.

The majority of the other projects selected by the Business for Peace Alliance were located in Kegalle and Kandy, in the Central and Sabaragamuwa Provinces respectively.

In Kandy, three companies were asking for support. Two of them were in the spice trade, both with many years of experience. They were requesting investment to help them to

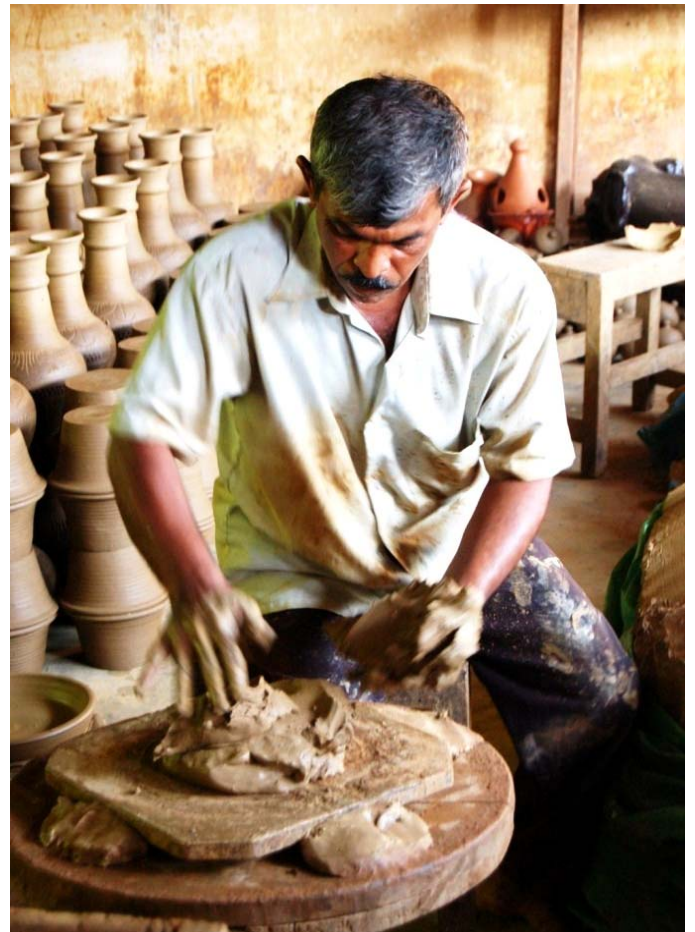
step up their production, providing the infrastructure and additional working capital to bring greater numbers of outgrowers into their systems.

The third project was in the handloom sector, put forward by a company producing silk and cotton products for local sale and export. They were proposing to use Rs. 20 million to build a new dye plant, increase the number of handlooms and open additional retail outlets.

The Chamber of Commerce was also interested in finding backers for the construction of a Convention and Exhibition Centre in Kandy.

In Kegalle, Rs. 4.8 million was requested to set up a new training centre, focusing on information technology, English language capacities and management skills, in rural areas. A further Rs. 1 million was targeted for a gold and silver jewellery business, to increase production.

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The closing session of the BizPact Invest in Sri Lanka Symposium was held back in Colombo, with the participation of various representatives of the Government, including Dr. Palitha Kohona, Secretary to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Secretary General of the Peace Secretariat Prof. Rajiva Wijesinha.

It began with comments from the Sri Lankan expatriates, focusing on their assessment of what they had seen over the five days. They also made a number of suggestions for the local business community to bear in mind going forward.

Jeremy Liyanage said, 'The message came through strongly. Businesses need support. I am going back to Australia with ideas for how the diaspora can get involved. We previously struggled to find a role, but it is now pretty clear what that role should be,' he said. He proposed to organise focus group mechanisms to test and market products, run workshops on trading with Australia and give what he felt was much needed help with product development. This was particularly so in the food industry, he stressed, where he saw little difference between products, apart from the labels.

He also called for more English language teaching and greater communication between the diaspora and Chambers of Commerce. Sri Lanka, he said, was waiting to spread her wings, and to do so it must encourage more foreign investment, a process in which the Chambers of Commerce had a strong role to play. He urged the Government to provide more support for such institutions.

From Germany, Susan Joachim pointed out that there was a lack of business acumen in Sri Lanka. Otherwise workable

The Southern Province was host to another project, with investment requested to support the further development of an ecotourism venture in Hambantota. This project was seeking Rs. 1.2 million to strengthen its capacity to market tours internationally. Meanwhile, Anuradhapura was targeted in the North Central Province, with a project costing Rs. 20 million to support the expansion of a curd making enterprise by setting up and training a network of dairy farmers. Profits of Rs. 1.3 million were projected.



projects failed because of a lack of training or inexperience, she said. She urged more investment in the Business for Peace Alliance too, to improve communication with Sri Lankan expatriates.

Keith Andrew from the United Kingdom proposed linking up with the Commonwealth Development Fund, which he said provided much of the necessary business training that the participants found so lacking. He said that the organisation was particularly interested in entrepreneurial development involving young businessmen, particularly those working in micro enterprise. They would be keen to provide workshops and training for them, he said, and free of charge.

Speaking on behalf of the Government, Palitha Kohona said, 'Sri Lanka is ready to join the 'Race to Prosperity'. My message is to grab the opportunity and go for it!' He went on to talk about the pro-LTTE bitterness of much of the Sri Lankan diaspora, saying that if only they were to come over and see for themselves, they would invest. 'We want LTTE supporters to come and visit Sri Lanka and make up their own minds,' he said. He spoke in defence of the Government's efforts to look after the victims of the conflict, stressing that 95% of the 190,000 IDPs in the Eastern Province were now back in their homes. The Northern Province would follow soon, he stressed.

Rajiva Wijesinha outlined the developments that he felt had in part been responsible for the rise of the LTTE. 'When standardisation led to fewer university places for youngsters in Colombo and Jaffna, the former went into private enterprises. However, there was nothing of the sort for the latter. By depriving people of opportunities we spawned destructiveness,' he said. He explained that the need today was for investment along with the development of human resources islandwide to ensure that nobody is left behind.

Many of the participants remarked that there was a need to look to the future, putting the conflict behind them. They are being presented with a chance to help the rural people, all of whom have been affected by the conflict in one way or another, and they should grasp it. They also agreed that there would be considerable potential for doing business in the years ahead, and that the country had excellent prospects.

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sense of optimistic opportunity and much excitement at the thought of a new beginning for a united Sri Lanka.

The BizPact Invest in Sri Lanka Symposium was organised by the Business for Peace Alliance. They received support from a number of other institutions, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Board of Investment, the Sri Lanka Tourism Authority, the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce, the National Chamber of Exporters, the American Chamber of Commerce in Sri Lanka, the European Chamber of Commerce in Sri Lanka and the Peace Secretariat.



Vavuniya welfare centres

Coping with 300,000 people



Many thousands of people have arrived in Vavuniya since the Peace Secretariat last reported on the situation in the welfare centres. The Security Forces broke the LTTE grip on its human shield in May, enabling the remaining civilians to move to the safety of Government controlled areas.

This presented the authorities with a huge challenge, as the IDPs had to be fed, treated for injuries and sickness, brought down from beyond Mullaitivu, given fresh clothes and provided with shelter. Most of their belongings had been left behind, and they had been allowed very little to eat in their final days with the LTTE. To escape, they had risked their lives. It was, therefore, in a poor state that they turned up.

The majority were taken directly to Menik Farm, to the newer camps that had been got ready in haste. Zone 2, which had been commissioned when over 100,000 persons escaped the LTTE in late April, is the most crowded of these sites, housing more than 70,000 people. Zones 3 and 4 currently account for over 40,000 each.

Prof. Rajiva Wijesinha, Secretary General of the Peace Secretariat, visited in June to assess progress, accompanied by staff who had been working in the IDP centres since the beginning of the year. It was immediately clear that a lot of improvements had been made. Many people had started their

own cooking, resolving complaints that used to be made about the quality of food packets provided by the authorities. Rubbish that had been left on the ground, attracting flies and therefore risking outbreaks of disease, had been cleared up. Likewise, attention had been paid to drainage, to get rid of the pools of standing water that had been worrying earlier.

Praising the Security Forces for the initiative that they had taken to resolve many of these problems, he expressed concern at the slow and costly manner in which some things were being done by international agencies. As well as the difficulties with toilets that are described elsewhere in this newsletter, where some NGOs made clear the comparative carelessness of others, there were issues in many other sectors. For example, some organisations who had undertaken to put up sheds to be used as classrooms, play areas or simply as places for people to gather out of the sun, had got far behind schedule. Given the amount of money that had been collected by international agencies citing the suffering of the IDPs, he said, it was unacceptable.

The Secretary General noted that the IDPs looked happier and healthier than on his previous visit. Life had restarted to a certain extent, with children playing games and their parents getting back to some kind of work, even if it was just cooking, repairing clothes and cleaning.

The impression of distinct improvement was confirmed on visiting the Indian Medical Centre in Zone 1 of Menik Farm. Having worked for a number of months in Pulmoddai, taking care of those wounded during the fighting, the team of eight doctors and four nurses had relocated as the last influx of civilians arrived in Vavuniya from the conflict areas. They told the Secretary General that they had seen around 10,000 patients and performed more than 40 major operations since May. The number of IDPs falling sick was decreasing, they reported, and there were now plenty of empty beds in their facility. It was obvious that their work, and that of the many Sri Lankan health professionals who were serving people in the IDP centres, deserved much praise. They had set a wonderful example, he said, with their courage, humanity and generosity, working without complaint under difficult conditions.

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Further improvements in the situation of the IDPs in Zones 1 to 4 will become possible once the Government completes its plan to reduce overcrowding by shifting people to new sites. Some 15 to 20 locations in the countryside between Menik Farm and Vavuniya have been identified and are in the process of being cleared by the Security Forces. Once these are ready, families will have more privacy, and there will be space for games, lessons and other activities to keep people usefully occupied. A couple have already been developed, to house some of the 20,000 people remaining in the Vavuniya schools. The latter were intended as transit camps, to be used only for a couple of weeks, but the sheer number of IDPs coming down from the conflict areas necessitated their being kept on. The Government intends to vacate them in the coming month, so as not to disrupt the education of local children any longer.

The Secretary General visited Weerapuram, where 6,000 people had been relocated a couple of weeks previously. Although dusty, as vegetation had been removed when the land was cleared by the Security Forces, the advantages of this site over the schools were obvious. Each family had its own relatively sizeable tent, gifted by the Chinese government, there was space for a number of shops and for lessons to be held



effectively, and children were able to run around and play games in the open areas. Unlike in the camps set up at the beginning, trees had been retained to provide shade.

Inspecting one of the Vavuniya schools still housing IDPs, the Secretary General noted that there had been improvements since his previous visit. The place seemed less crowded, as quite a number of elderly people had been allowed to leave to stay with family members. It was also cleaner, the authorities having organised themselves a little better in the intervening time. Water was delivered by bowser now too, which put less of a strain on the local system.

It was noteworthy that security restrictions had been relaxed to the extent that visitors were allowed into all of the IDP centres, and that they were permitted to bring food and other items. The camaraderie between the IDPs and the young security personnel was remarkable, with children having to be restrained by elders from being too familiar.

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What can be achieved for the IDPs with commitment was demonstrated in Zone 0 at Menik Farm, the original site established by the Government. Housing 20,000 people in semi-permanent structures, with concrete floors so that they are easy to keep clean and remain livable in during the rainy season, and with cadjan roofs that keep them cool, this place had become both attractive and comfortable. People had been encouraged to grow fruits and vegetables in the land around their houses, both to improve the environment by reducing dust and increasing green areas, and to give them the possibility to vary their diet. There were school buildings with large classrooms, and both children and teachers had been provided with uniforms. Meanwhile, vocational classes were taking place in subjects such as motor mechanics, sewing and computing. Students having a carpentry lesson, making coconut scrapers, showed both pride and pleasure in their work, which was heartening. The camp was also equipped with play areas, a telecommunications centre, a post office and several banks.

During his trip to Vavuniya, the Secretary General also visited a number of the rehabilitation centres for LTTE cadres. These were located in school buildings and hostels, which had all the necessary facilities, albeit sometimes in limited quantities.

A total of 9,500 LTTE cadres are being held, having either surrendered or been identified by the Security Forces. The Secretary General urged that a list be put up in each of the IDP centres so that people would know where to find their family members, but judging by the number of visitors that the LTTE cadres were receiving, relatives had already been informed about the fate of their loved ones. Women had been separated from men, and there was a combination of old and new recruits in each location. Female soldiers were in charge of the camps in which the female cadres were being held, while male soldiers guarded the male cadres. One of the women had just delivered a baby, for which she had been taken to the local hospital, and plans were being made to reunite them with her family. In all the rehabilitation centres, relations between the inmates and security personnel seemed good.

While facilities for washing, cooking and sleeping were in place, activities were limited. Some of the camps had televisions

and sports equipment, but not all. Books were in short supply. The vocational training that has been planned for LTTE cadres had not started, although English and Sinhala lessons were available in a few locations. The Secretary General was concerned that this might lead to boredom, and encouraged the commanders to get the inmates engaged in dancing, singing and playing games, even if formal education had to wait for centrally organised programmes to start.

In addition, the party heard some excellent singing from inmates. On returning to Colombo, the Secretary General contacted the Sr Lanka Broadcasting Corporation to suggest a talent competition in the rehabilitation centres, to showcase particular skills.

To sum up the situation, despite difficulties the various state agencies are working well with the Competent Authority and the Government Agent to ensure that things are getting better all the time for those who had suffered so much previously while in LTTE captivity.

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Resettlement begins in Mannar

In June, 561 families in Mannar were resettled, a welcome sign that the Government's resettlement plans are proceeding apace.

The returnees are from seven GN Divisions, and were initially displaced in 2007 when fighting between the Army and the LTTE intensified. They are a mixture of Tamils and Muslims, and had been making their living either by fishing or through paddy cultivation. They have spent the last two years in Nanattan, an area about 40 kilometres south of Musali, with family and friends, or in welfare centres.

They are now returning to their old homes, some of which are intact, rebuilt or in the process of being rebuilt, in which case they have to live temporarily in tents. The Government is providing basic necessities such as dry rations, cooking utensils and drinking water, and each family is being given Rs. 25,000 to start life over.

The Minister of Resettlement and Disaster Relief Services Rishad Bathiudeen said, 'These families can resume their livelihoods, especially agriculture, the fishing industry and self-employment.' 'We will reconstruct the Hathimurippu tank, under which 7,000 acres in the Musali DS division could be brought under the plough,' he went on. He explained, 'The area where these families are being resettled has been cleared of mines. The Government has upgraded the infrastructure facilities as well. The road network in the DS division has been rehabilitated and an electricity supply has been provided to the villages in which these families are being resettled.'

The Government is undertaking a massive infrastructure development programme in the region. Mannar district has been allocated a block sum of Rs. 8 billion to date, as was reported in the national press recently. In addition, the World Bank has promised Rs. 380 million for the reconstruction of Giant's Tank.

The returnees are unanimous in expressing joy at the change in their fortunes, although their happiness is sometimes tinged with sadness at the plight of those still waiting to be resettled. One Musali farmer said, 'In the 1990s, ninety percent of the population of Musali was Muslim. On October 24, 1990, the LTTE came and told everyone to leave within 24 hours. And they did - to Puttalam, Anuradhapura, Colombo, Kurunegala, and other places - and are still there. There are nearly 6,000 families in Puttalam alone. I hope that all these people can also come back to their old homes.' Speaking of his personal observations of returnees, he said that people were 'happy', that relations with the Security Forces were 'good', and that people were starting to fish and to cultivate.

Another returnee, Mr. Riyaz Mohammed from Koolankulam, said that he was happy to be back, but that there were still some problems that he would like to see addressed, such as the lack of electricity and clean drinking water. Koolankulam, meanwhile, is one of the GN Divisions where the previous houses of the residents have suffered the most damage, due either to natural causes or fighting. Mr. Riyaz said, 'When we left, we went in such a rush that we left a stock of grain in our



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- returnee from Arrippu

house. Some elephants have come to eat the grain and, in the process, destroyed the entire house!' He now has to live in a temporary tent, until the Government finishes building him a new house.

A returnee from Arrippu said that he was overjoyed at coming back to his old home, and thankful to the Government for the reconstruction and infrastructure improvements it had made in his area. Arrippu East and West have the most number of returnees. Moreover, this is where the previous houses have suffered the least amount of damage. He said that he and his neighbours were 'fully dependant on fishing' and that they had already begun to go to sea in the boats that they had brought from Nanattan. 'It is almost like we never left, but now that we are back, they have given us even better facilities than we had before,' he said.

Sadly however, Mannar represents only a small proportion of the total number of IDPs, but the Government is committed to resettling the rest as soon as possible. It is hoped that the majority of the nearly 300,000 IDPs who were displaced from Mannar, Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu in the recent fighting will be able to return to their homes by the end of the year. The obstacles to this further progress lie in both the security issues surrounding a few IDPs and the serious and lengthy business of demining and rebuilding infrastructure and housing in such areas. Progress in the East however, where 200,000 IDPs were resettled within nine months, augurs well for the North too, and suggests that all the IDPs can - and will - be resettled in the near future.

Reaching consensus in the APRC



Three years have passed since the All Party Representatives Committee was established. The Peace Secretariat spoke to its Chairman, Prof. Tissa Witharana, about the progress made to date and his expectations for the days ahead. The following are excerpts:

It has been a very meaningful exercise. There are 13 political parties involved in the process at the moment, and we have had 120 meetings up to now. The discussions have been in depth, as anyone reading the records that have been maintained by the Hansard reporters would see. Every word that every participant has said has been written down and these documents are available. I am happy to say that everyone has worked very hard and made a contribution to the discussion. We have covered both the background as well as the history of each issue, from the perspective of the different communities and the different political parties.

We have now got to the point where on all the political issues that are relevant to formulating our proposals, agreement has been reached. There is a consensus that is acceptable to all participants, and they represent all communities.

I think that this is a significant achievement. Although some people complain that it has taken a long time to get to this point, this is not the case. Take the question of electoral reforms. The current parliament has a Select Committee for Electoral Reforms, which has continued the work started by the previous parliament, but it has yet to conclude its report. They are still quibbling. In the All Party Representatives Committee, we have come to an agreement on electoral reforms. What's more, this is only one of more than twenty issues that we have discussed.

What is being achieved is power sharing, both at the centre and at the periphery. Devolution will be extended to the existing nine provinces equally, and we are reviving the traditional village committee system, adapted to the present circumstances, to bring devolution to the people themselves.

Among the major issues we have solved with regard to devolution is the question of the concurrent list. In India, the existence of powers that can be exercised both by the centre and by the periphery has led to impasse on many occasions. A large number of cases have been filed, and this has only benefitted lawyers. We have tried to avoid this by having a clear separation of powers.

We have also tackled the issue of financing for the devolved administrations, which has been a problem in the current system. Funds for both the provinces and local government institutions need to be made available if the elected representatives are to fulfil their responsibilities.

Many compromises have been reached over the course of the three years. For example, there was a request by the Muslims to have a separate enclave in the Eastern Province, linking together adjoining electorates where there is a Muslim majority, to establish a separate administration modelled on the provincial councils. Similarly, the Indian Tamil community requested a similar enclave in the Hill Country. This was not accepted by the majority of the participants in the All Party Representatives Committee, and we have decided instead on the establishment of two community councils, somewhat on the Belgian model. This has the advantage that it will meet their needs outside the North and East too.

Likewise, there were concerns about the retention of the unitary state. In the original document that I prepared for the All Party Representatives Committee, I had avoided the use of terms like unitary and federal, like they do in the Indian constitution, purely describing what we thought was necessary

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in our country. However, because the Sri Lanka Freedom Party and several other parties insisted on reference to the unitary state, we have included it. There have been a lot of objections to federal measures, so we have tried as far as possible to avoid them. For example, in the procedures for amending the constitution, we have opted for an arrangement through the senate, which we are establishing as part of the central government, rather than involving the provinces.

Thanks to the process we have been following, which has involved looking at experiences in other countries as well as reviewing our history, many of the Tamil and Muslim parties have understood that it would be possible to have proper devolution within a unitary state. This has been the case in Northern Ireland, even without the protection of a written constitution. They have come to see that the unitary state is no barrier to achieving their desires and addressing their needs.

The newspapers have manufactured all kinds of stories about the All Party Representatives Committee, particularly concerning the amount of time that we would take to present our final document. In fact, no timetable can be given, because we are in the process of drafting our proposals, one paragraph at a time. Participants have different ideas about how a certain point should be put across, so I can't say how long it will take. I hope that we will be able to finish soon, but I am not the only participant involved. It depends on how everyone cooperates in the discussions. As I said, the most important stages of the process are already complete, so this is just a question of dotting the i's and crossing the t's. We have resolved all the political issues.

Once the draft is ready, we have to take it to the political parties who have not been participating in the process. In my view, it is critical that the two main political parties in the country accept our proposals. The Sri Lanka Freedom Party has been involved throughout, of course, but the United National Party has stayed away to date. If those two political parties were to sign up, the message would go to the Tamil and Muslim parties that whatever government was in power, the agreement would be honoured, because the United National Party and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party are the ones who are able to form governments in this country.

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agreement has been reached.***

To that end, I have been in communication with Mr. Choksy, the representative of the United National Party, throughout the three years, keeping him informed of developments in the All Party Representatives Committee. Our intention is to invite the United National Party to rejoin the process as soon as the draft is out.

Once we include their inputs, we can ask other political parties for their comments. I will give a copy of our proposals to the Tamil National Alliance and the other Tamil parties who have not been participating to date, including the Tamil United Liberation Front of Mr. Anandasangaree, the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam headed by Mr. Siddharta, and the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front Vardhar wing of Mr. Sritharan. Earlier we had thought that the proposals would have to be put to the Tigers, but this is no longer so.

There are also the political parties from the Sinhala community to think of. The Jathika Hela Urumaya and the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna participated in the All Party Representatives Committee until just ten months or so ago. They made a significant contribution to the draft. We hope that once we present the final document, they will add to what they have already said, and we will try to accommodate their wishes as far as possible. The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna came for only 21 meetings. We will do everything possible to get their inputs before we complete the process, but it is up to them. Their contributions will be assessed by the All Party Representatives Committee and, if reasonable and acceptable, they will be taken onboard.

This is going to be hard work, and there are no shortcuts to reaching agreement. However, we have come a long way in three years, and the end is in sight now.



The Geneva front



The Special Session of the Human Rights Council that was held recently focused attention on the international campaign against the Government and its efforts to return the country to peace. By going all out to chastise Sri Lanka for its victory over the LTTE, without reference to the ground situation, the people behind the operation exposed their insincerity.

In fact, the witch hunt began more than two years ago. As soon as the Government decided that it could no longer ignore the LTTE's violations of the Ceasefire Agreement, as the organisation ratcheted up pressure by first abducting children and killing off its opponents from within the Tamil community, culminating in the deaths of the Foreign Minister and the Deputy Secretary General of the Peace Secretariat, then launching a deadly campaign against the Security Forces, a handful of European countries leapt into action.

Britain was eager to use the Human Rights Council to force the Government to call off the military operations. When the current Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva arrived in post in 2007, a motion against Sri Lanka had already been tabled, and his British counterpart was agitating for it to be taken up for discussion. The LTTE was on its way to being pushed out of the Eastern Province, giving rise to

The Europeans urging punitive action against Sri Lanka were in turn being pushed by the LTTE's representatives in the Tamil diaspora. Losses on the battlefield were motivating these people to work harder than ever before.

speculation that the organisation was headed for early retirement.

Ambassador Jayatilleka declined to negotiate a statement, telling Britain that there was no justification for such an attack on the Government. The ground situation did not warrant it.

The practice of sending a high powered delegation led by Minister Samarasinghe to Geneva at regular intervals was started at this point, as a means of countering the increasing pressure. The Europeans urging punitive action against Sri

Lanka were in turn being pushed by the LTTE's representatives in the Tamil diaspora. These people were organised and had developed excellent connections with both politicians and the media, and losses on the battlefield were motivating them to work harder than ever before.

At each of the regular meetings of the Human Rights Council, Europe did its best to make trouble for the Sri Lankan delegation. All possible hangers-on were dragged into this, from the International Independent Group of Eminent Persons observing the Commission of Inquiry into Serious Violations of Human Rights in Sri Lanka, who suddenly began issuing statements to coincide with its sessions without consulting the Government as they had agreed to do, to the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The latter was so determined to foist a local office on Sri Lanka that all practical assistance to improve standards was refused, with Louise Arbour insisting that only a strengthened presence in the country would do.

Her successor, Navi Pillay, got caught in the same trap, as demonstrated by the statement her office released without discussion with the Government earlier this year. Even more curiously, a number of Special Rapporteurs also despatched stinging criticisms on matters outside their areas of responsibility, and without the required consultation.

This all came to a head in May, as the LTTE was on the verge of losing the war. The Security Forces had by that time recaptured all but a tiny sliver of land, and it was clear that they would eventually take that too. At this point, Ambassador Jayatilleka was told by a number of his counterparts that European states were trying to convene a Special Session. They had been canvassing for the necessary signatures.

The intentions behind this move were clearly suspect, as the Indian ambassador said later, because there had been no attempt to consult with neighbouring countries. No South Asian nation was asked for its opinion on the ground situation. India was clearly best placed to know what was happening only a few miles from its own territory, and its concern for the Tamil people was beyond question.

Britain hoped to be able to gather enough signatures to hold the Special Session on the 14th, which happened to be exactly the moment when the Security Forces were poised to launch their final assault on the LTTE, but Ambassador Jayatilleka had been working to build up a coalition of states to oppose the move. Secretary General of the Peace Secretariat Prof. Rajiva Wijesinha joined him on the 12th, to support his efforts with the latest information from the ground.

During the meetings the Sri Lankan team had with the various members of the Human Rights Council, serious questions were raised on the human rights situation in the country and on the status of the Internally Displaced People who had come down from the conflict areas.

On the basis of these discussions, many countries agreed not to sign the motion being put forward by the Europeans calling for a Special Session. This included all neighbouring countries, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, plus traditional allies like the Non-Aligned Movement, Russia and China. A number of others, including South Africa and most of Latin America, also came on board.

The intentions behind the move to convene a Special Session were clearly suspect, as the Indian ambassador pointed out later, because there had been no attempt to consult with the neighbouring countries.

During the weekend of the 16th and 17th, the Government announced that the conflict was over, as was confirmed by President Mahinda Rajapaksa in an address to Parliament on the 19th. All territory had come under the control of the Security Forces by that stage, and the majority of the LTTE leaders were dead. Civilians who had been kept in the conflict areas as a human shield had by then escaped.

The reason for calling the Special Session, at least as far as it was explained by the initiators of the process, was to look into the situation of the civilians that the LTTE had been holding back to protect its cadres and equipment from the advancing Security Forces. There had been allegations of civilian deaths, whether directly at the hands of the LTTE or in the crossfire between the two sides. Once the civilians had reached the safety of the Vavuniya welfare centres, this rationale no longer made sense.

Nevertheless, the Europeans pushed on. As well as desperate lobbying in Geneva, tremendous pressure was exerted in national capitals, from Argentina to Azerbaijan and Bosnia and Herzegovina to Burkina Faso.





Seventeen countries eventually agreed to sign, as was almost inevitable in the circumstances. The Special Session was scheduled for the 26th and 27th.

Given that this was a full week after the last civilians had been rescued by the Security Forces, it wasn't clear what the objective could be. Prof. Wijesinha questioned the British representatives about a statement made by their Foreign Minister in which he implied that the Special Session would be used to push for an investigation into war crimes. This was hardly the kind of urgent problem that could justify such a course of action, especially given that Sri Lanka was due to be discussed in the regular meeting of the Human Rights Council the following week. They admitted that they were under pressure to be seen to act.

On the suggestion of the countries who backed Sri Lanka's position, Ambassador Jayatilleka drafted a statement to put to the Special Session for discussion. This was presented to as many delegations as possible, with changes being made when they were proposed in good faith. Indeed, the final version of the Sri Lankan draft incorporated many of these suggestions.

Talks were also held in the run up to the Special Session with the European group, which was led by Switzerland. Sri Lanka went into these meetings with the Indian and Pakistani ambassadors, plus the representative of the Non-Aligned Movement. Convinced of the situation, these allies spoke even more strongly than our representatives. Meanwhile, Switzerland was accompanied by the rather less convinced delegates from the Czech Republic, who currently hold the Presidency of the European Union, while officials from Britain lurked in the rear. The intention was to seek a compromise, as in fact the Americans had been urging throughout. Although Europe suggested that they might accept the establishment of a local office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in place of a war crimes probe, in the end it was all or nothing.

After Navi Pillay's interjection at the opening of the Special Session, there was no way that Sri Lanka was going to allow

The final score was 29 to 12, with five of the original signatories having changed their minds during the course of the Special Session. Only three countries outside Europe voted against Sri Lanka.

her to strengthen her role. Indeed, many countries were furious. She used her position to deliver a speech that was essentially all about war crimes.

Ambassador Jayatilleka had got the Sri Lankan draft tabled ahead of the competing statement by Switzerland, so it had to be taken up first. Once Europe realised that the debate wasn't going its way, a whole lot of amendments were put forward, only to be dismissed following a strong intervention by the Cuban ambassador and a vote that Sri Lanka and its allies won by 22 to 17.

By the time it came to the vote on the statement itself, it was clear that Sri Lanka had the upper hand. Indeed, the BBC, who had requested an interview with Prof. Wijesinha for the evening of the 27th, obviously in anticipation of putting him on the spot in the aftermath of a defeat, decided halfway through the day to cancel the appointment.

The final score came out at 29 to 12, with five of the original signatories having deserted their European masters during the course of the Special Session. Only three countries outside Europe voted against Sri Lanka. These were Canada, Mexico and Chile. Meanwhile, notable abstentions came from Japan and South Korea. Argentina, Gabon, Mauritius and the Ukraine also remained neutral. The vast majority of members of the Human Rights Council were clearly unhappy with the European attempt to attack this country.

This was also obvious in the meetings the Sri Lankan delegation had with its counterparts in the aftermath of the Special Session. The agenda had been taken away from the West, perhaps for the first time, giving rise to a sense of euphoria. There was also a feeling that a joint effort was needed, going forward, to bring the Human Rights Council back to its intended mandate, which is to ask questions but not target individual countries. Another point that came up was the need to look into the role of Special Rapporteurs, some of whom had exceeded their mandates to attack Sri Lanka.

There was an attempt, especially by the British press, to describe what happened as a clash between Western countries, presented as the goodies, and the rest of us. The Times, perhaps fed by the British foreign ministry, claimed that it had turned into a fight between those countries who believed in human rights and the ones who violated them. It was an opportunity for a little China and Russia baiting too. The newspaper claimed that Sri Lanka had been let off the hook by equally bad regimes.

Of course there are many problems with this characterisation of the events of the Special Session. Most importantly, this ignores the very serious questions that were posed to Ambassador Jayatilleka about what was happening on the

ground. It also ignores the fact that Sri Lanka was backed by a whole range of countries outside the traditional group who stand against Western intervention in domestic concerns.

Britain was clearly mad at having been wrongfooted. Coincidentally or otherwise, it was immediately after the vote in the Human Rights Council that The Times launched its ridiculous claims of 20,000 civilian deaths in the fighting. That this assertion does not stand up to even very careless scrutiny has been made clear by the Peace Secretariat already, but the timing of the apparent leak was also suspect.

The witch hunt did not stop there. Indeed, attacks on the Government have become even more shrill as time has gone on. Most shockingly of all, the High Commissioner for Human Rights used her intervention in the regular meeting of the Human Rights Council the following week to lay into Sri Lanka once again. She repeated the call for a war crimes probe, despite that proposal having been rejected wholeheartedly during the Special Session.

In response, several countries spoke angrily of the need for representatives of the United Nations to adhere to decisions

taken in the established democratic bodies of the organisation. A resolution was also tabled for discussion at the close of the Human Rights Council sessions urging Special Rapporteurs to confine themselves to the subjects given to them, without issuing statements for political reasons.

Sri Lanka emerged from the Special Session in a stronger position than before, having convinced the majority of countries that we had conducted what was a necessary campaign against the LTTE in a decent fashion. The relationships developed in the process will undoubtedly stand us in good stead in the future, as we work to put an end to the witch hunt.

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several countries spoke angrily of
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What the independent Western media will not investigate

1. How much did it cost to have the Special Session?
2. Which countries relentlessly put pressure on others, in capitals and in private houses and at bilateral meetings, to ensure that there were enough signatures to get the Special Session?
3. Why was the original assertion, that the Special Session was needed for civilians caught in the conflict zone, changed to a more general purpose while the media was led to believe that the Special Session was intended to introduce a war crimes probe?
4. Why did the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights announce at the Special Session on Gaza that Sri Lanka would be next, and did she attempt to pressurise countries into asking for such a thing?
5. Why did several independent experts issue a call for a probe coinciding with the efforts of some European nations to have a Special Session on May 14th?
6. Did they exceed their mandate then, and also when they added their accusatory voice to the High Commissioner's at the beginning of the Special Session?
7. Why were no countries in the South Asian region consulted on the matter, and why was there much secrecy for many weeks, until it became manifest that sufficient signatures would not be forthcoming before the May 14th?
8. Did some Europeans indicate that the call for a Special Session would be dropped if Sri Lanka engaged in a structured briefing session, while others were pursuing signatures and claiming that commitments were flexible since a multi-track approach was always acceptable?
9. Were there any countries that regretted the destruction of the terrorist LTTE?
10. Which countries had contacts with the new leader of the LTTE, Mr Pathmanathan, who is wanted by Interpol on criminal charges?
11. What expectations were given to LTTE supporters, including former officials of the TRO that collected money for LTTE use, who had arranged to come to Geneva on May 14th, and who appeared and spoke at the Special Session?
12. Which countries shared the view of the British that a call for a war crimes probe was essential to calm the feelings of LTTE supporters who were demanding this, and would such demands with regard to the activities of other countries be similarly indulged?

The Western use of toilets

The saddest aspect of the war of attrition that some prospective donors are conducting against the Sri Lankan government is that its main victims will be the poor civilians who were rescued from the Tigers. It will be remembered that their prolonged captivity was also due in part to the connivance of some Western interventionists in the Tiger strategy of dragging them along with the terrorist forces as they retreated. History now repeats itself in the determination to subject Tamil civilians to squalor in what the West presents as its subtle effort to ensure swift resettlement.

Since however this is a principle they have never bothered about in the past, it is a moot point whether some at least are not serving another agenda. The majority, one has to hope, are full of good intentions, though with their usual ignorance they are allowing themselves to be led by the nose by the nasty.

When the Tigers were preparing their hostage crisis, the so called humanitarian community, led by the UN, kept silent about this strategy, about the forced recruitment by the Tigers of children and one person, then two, per family, about the refusal to let Sri Lankan humanitarian workers and their families leave the ever dwindling space controlled by the Tigers.

Their staff, one hopes acting on their own and not with higher sanction, though nevertheless confident of impunity, kept providing information to the media, Bernard Dix taken on by the UN from the shadowy Solidar group that were responsible for the vehicles the Tigers used to build their defences, John Campbell with his British military background, the anonymous Western diplomats who were quoted as claiming that the Sri Lankan government wanted to destroy the Tamils and who obligingly revealed what they claimed were UN figures of civilian casualties, the hirelings in Geneva who accidentally put satellite information on their website and then rang up journalists to tell them to make sure they checked this out.

The strategy failed. While some Europeans were busily cultivating Mr Pathmanathan, in spite of his being wanted by Interpol, and others were trying to collect signatures to put Sri Lanka into the dock before the Tigers were destroyed, the Sri Lankan forces destroyed the Tigers, or rather those who were not in safety amongst their European cash cows. They also rescued the rest of the civilians whom the Tigers had entrapped, making clear the care with which the whole operation had been conducted, even TamilNet not being able to claim during the first part of May that, except on a couple of occasions on which the Tigers are on record as having shot at fleeing civilians, there had been significant civilian casualties.

But all these displaced Sri Lankans seem now to have given the bleeding hearts of the West their second bite at the cherry. The strategy now is to make sure that they suffer in the camps, put into tents in which they cannot stand, that they do not have enough to eat, that they have to endure squalid toilets and perhaps suffer the epidemics that were predicted so confidently month after month over the last year, and which the sustained work of our Ministry of Health so skilfully avoided.

The proof of what is going on is provided by the contrast between the facilities made available to the displaced in Zones



We are not allowed any input into the quality of the facilities given to our citizens. Nor can we point out that it is obviously wasteful to deliberately provide stuff that cannot last for more than three months.

0 and 1, which were prepared by the Sri Lankan government, and the facilities elsewhere. We remember being horrified when, at the beginning of May, we first saw Zone 2, in which UN tents were piled up, with disgusting toilets and none of the open spaces we had been promised. The tents were not at all the dignified structures the UNHCR head had described to us when we objected to some of the tents we had seen in Zone 3 on our previous visit.

But that had been in April, before the massive influx, and we excused UNHCR on the grounds that they had hurriedly airfreighted in a large number of tents to meet emergency requirements. It was only later that we realised that they had ignored us when we had pointed out that much cheaper tents were available locally, that much of one of the tranches of assistance the British bestowed whenever they were allowed to visit had gone on the airfreighting, and that duty too had to be paid on these tiny tents that would last for only a very short time.

We were also told that these were cheap Chinese tents, which was the best the UN could provide for the limited amount permitted for what was termed emergency shelter – only to find the following week that the Chinese government gifted with no fuss at all extremely comfortable high quality tents which gave the poor displaced people some sort of dignity, dignity that the emergency provisions laid down by the UN seemed determined to deny.

But Sri Lanka is not allowed any input into the quality of the facilities given to our citizens. Nor can we point out that it is obviously wasteful to deliberately provide stuff that cannot last more than three months, and then spend more on replacing it, when much better longer lasting stuff can be provided for not much more than the initial cost.

And then, if what was happening with shelter was bad enough, with sanitation it was infinitely worse. After our initial complaints UNICEF has rung up regularly to tell us that they are doing better, and that they will consult local agencies about better standards, but what seems to be going on still is quite disgusting. Though the Ministry of Resettlement has actually issued a notice about the standards required as to toilets, our Western decision makers, with no idea about how Asians use toilets, continue to provide rubbish, on occasion using wooden structures which may survive a few months when water is not used, but which will rot swiftly in Sri Lanka.

But the UN insists that they can only put up structures that will soon disintegrate. They make a virtue of this by claiming that they are protecting the poor suffering people from what they call protracted internment, but they seem to us to be succumbing to the temptation of many of those clothed in brief authority, which is to engage in as much construction as possible, and give out as many contracts as you possibly can. So there will be new toilets every few months, and they will disintegrate well before they are expected to, and then the humanitarian community can exult at the squalor they themselves have precipitated, and issue contracts for more short term toilets.

How wicked some of these people are can be seen in the intensity with which they objected to the cheap and simple and durable toilets constructed by the Confidence Building and Stabilisation Measures Project in the more civilized part of Menik Farm way back in December. There were massive objections to these, by the donors we were told, on the grounds that the project was funded by UNHCR and toilets were not the business of UNHCR. The claim was that these should have been entrusted to UNICEF, but in the end we believe the reason for the venom directed at decent toilets was nothing to do with a turf war. It was simply that Sri Lankans had built something that would last, but the anally retentive international community wanted to do it their way. In the process they could precipitate some of the horrors they have been predicting, ensuring that

things go wrong in an exercise they have disapproved of from the start.

With fiendish glee, the humanitarian community is doing the same with regard to what is termed complementary food as well, insisting despite the enormous sums they have mopped up through what is termed the Humanitarian Appeal on behalf of Sri Lankans that they will only use the money on their terms. This means that, unless they get their way, they will pull the plug in July, which they think (with their usual brilliant mathematical skills) is three months after the last IDPs arrived in the camps. Needless to say, the sums given on behalf of Sri Lankans will continue to be used to pay the salaries of the expatriates who have been flooding in in greater and greater numbers that parallel (in dollar cost terms at least) the numbers of the displaced.

It will be ironic if the displaced, who suffered so much at the hands of the Tigers, who were brutalised for many years whilst the internationals who built up at such cost their capacity to be exploited kept quiet about the conscription and much else, will continue to suffer because these same internationals withhold the funds they have accumulated. Perhaps the Sri Lankans who also suffered for so long, while the Tigers collected funds abroad, will step in to help their fellow citizens. They may not be able to do as much, but they are not likely to allow further suffering to become a weapon of war in the way the international humanitarian community has planned. And in the process we would at last have learned how hollow are the protestations of decency when compared with the naked self interest that has so successfully exploited the rest of the world for so long.

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What the West does not say



For many years we indulged the LTTE, in part because we felt sorry for the Tamils of Sri Lanka and believed the LTTE slogan that Tigers were Tamils and Tamils were Tigers, and in part because we thought that the Tigers would win out and would provide us with a useful base to extend our influence in South Asia.

Even though we were present in profusion in Tiger controlled areas, we kept quiet about their forced recruitment of one person per family. This was recorded in several internal United Nations documents, back in 2007 and earlier, but these were documents that none of us leaked. Leaks occur only when we want them to occur. We also kept quiet when in 2008 they raised the level of forced conscription to two per family.

We connived at their refusal to release child soldiers, and we were grateful when, in 2007, five years after the Ceasefire Agreement was signed, and long after we had given them a million dollars for the purpose, they said that they would finally release and rehabilitate a few. We accepted their explanation that they could not release those over 17 years of age since their legislation provided for such recruitment. While officially representing the United Nations, we repeated their use of such terms, even though we knew that national and international law forbade this practice, and that terrorists could not legislate.

For many years we spent millions of dollars of taxpayer money in LTTE controlled areas on projects with no identifiable outcomes. When asked for examples of the capacity we had developed, we claimed that we had taught the people to boil water before they drank it.

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When the LTTE was corralling people into ever smaller areas, though we granted that the health situation was under control, we predicted that there would soon be epidemics. These monthly predictions were widely publicised in our media outlets. When the predicted epidemics did not take place, we gave no credit to the health services which had been maintained by government for years in the LTTE controlled areas, but rather declared that the reason was our having taught the peasants to boil water before drinking it.

We kept quiet right through 2008 when the Tigers were forcing people to flee along with them. We heard the Sri Lankan government asking us to condemn this and demand that the Tigers let their people go, but we said and did nothing, in part because we did not want to damage our relations with the Tigers, and in part because we thought this a very clever tactic

which would help us at the end to halt the advance of the Sri Lankan forces.

We continued to say nothing even when our own workers were forbidden to leave with their families, and we realised that they too would be held hostage by the Tigers in the endgame that was planned. It was only when the trap had been set and escape was difficult that, towards the end of 2008, a few of us started asking the Tigers to release the civilians.

From the beginning of 2009 we started making up figures of killed civilians. We used the term extrapolate, and came up with figures far in excess of those for which we had our own witnesses, much in excess of those for which we had reports from Tiger sources. We agreed that the figures in our reports were uncertain, but we managed regularly to leak these reports, at crucial moments which we thought essential to slow the advance of the Sri Lankan forces.

On the first day on which there were reports of many civilian deaths, which we initially attributed to the Government, we later found that most were attributable to the LTTE. Though we put this on record to the Government, which is the closest we will ever come to an apology, we made sure that this wasn't done in public.

We arranged for what we felt was evidence against the Government to appear on a website and called up journalists to make sure that they saw this, and we made sure that there was no inquiry into what we claimed was an accident, nor into any leaks.

We know that several of our employees have carried or secreted weapons, but this does not take away from our right to insist that none of us be searched, and we can only hope that some things will not be found.

We use large gas guzzling vehicles, travelling in convoy, often with only one driver in them, but we are spending all this money only on behalf of the poor suffering Sri Lankan people.

We have used these vehicles to secrete LTTE personnel, most recently getting some of them out of the camps in Vavuniya in which they have been so unfairly confined, because they are really freedom fighters and we believe in freedom of expression, and the freedom to express oneself violently should not be circumscribed provided the victims are not us.

We know that not many of us do anything improper, and that the vast majority behave very well, have never done anything that might give strength to terrorists, and have never sought to undermine the democratically elected government of this country which is such a comfortable place to live in if you are well off.

However, we know that to admit that any of us has done anything wrong would undermine the whole mystique that allows us to function with such authority, and therefore we will deny almost everything, and simply apologise when we cannot deny, but never in writing, since that leaves things vague enough and liable to be forgotten soon. We will not have any inquiries into anything that might be wrong, and we will certainly never

make public the results of such inquiries if by chance they do end up occurring.

We know that in general Sri Lankan officials don't do anything very wrong, and only a few might err, but we have to point the finger generally to ensure that problems don't recur, and insist that full responsibility be taken for any error by the state as a whole, through inquiries which can preferably be run by us.

If people accuse us of double standards with regard to this or anything else, they should understand that by any standard we are richer and, what's more, we control the international media. By God, who lives somewhere in the West, we intend to keep it that way.

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Mannar economy:

Have we forgotten its potential?

The Mannar district suffers terribly from poverty and underdevelopment, but this wasn't always the case. Decades of conflict have led to neglect, and displacement is a major problem too - of the population of 104,000, more than 14,000 people are from other districts, while at least 70,000 people from Mannar are living elsewhere. With enough focused aid and investment, allied with resettlement of its previous inhabitants, the Mannar district could improve rapidly.

Twenty years ago, Sri Lanka's biggest paddy crop was harvested from the Mannar rice bowl. Even today, more than 60% of the population is involved in paddy cultivation.

After the district was liberated from the LTTE in June last year, the Government launched a programme to get paddy cultivation back on track. The 'Yali Pibidemu' project of the Ministry of Nation Building is working to increase the paddy harvest in the Nanattan, Adampan and Musali regions, with 25,000 acres expected to be put under the plough. Lands have been demined and farmers are getting back to work.

The paddy harvest is slowly returning to the high levels seen in the early 1980s. However, it is still far below full capacity and much work needs to be done to reverse the beating it took during the years of conflict. To return it to its glory days, as Mr. Rex Culas, President of the Mannar District Chamber of Commerce, says, 'the immediate need is for the displaced people to be resettled and opportunities for basic paddy farming livelihoods returned to normalcy.'

A major constraint is the severe lack of milling facilities in Mannar. Following the displacements in 1985 and 1990, the 20 or so rice mills operating there closed down. There used to be a large rice mill in Nanattan, run by the Paddy Marketing Board, which was available for all paddy farmers in Mannar. Currently there are a few small rice mills, but these are capable of milling only for local consumption, and that too, barely. As in the East, much of the paddy cultivated in Mannar is transported to Vavuniya and other areas and is milled there and brought back to Mannar as rice. The people in Mannar, including the paddy cultivators, therefore have to pay higher prices for the finished product, despite having sold the paddy at a lower price.

The World Bank has promised Rs. 385 million under its 'Reawakening' project to rehabilitate the Giant's Tank. It provides irrigation to over 30,000 acres in the district and channels water to over 162 small tanks and waterways. The project is set to be completed in 2010, and will benefit over 6,500 families. In addition, there are other major tanks like Sannar, Kooral, Akathimurippu and Viyayadhikulam, which have a capacity to feed 5,000 acres.

The Mannar district has a coastline that stretches 163 km, from Theavnpiddi in the North to Mullikulam in the East and Talaimannar in the South. This is a remarkable marine environment with tremendous potential for fishing. It includes Mannar Island, which is encircled by a shallow continental shelf that is rich in fishing banks, as well as having a pearl bank and being rich in prawns.

There are more than 9,000 active fishermen in Mannar, but prior to the conflict there were around 17,000. It is estimated that there are 20,000 inactive fishermen in the district. Fisheries provide employment to around 25% of the population, and in some core fishing areas as much as 40 to 50% of the population relies heavily on fishing. Mannar fishermen produce around 8,500 MT of fish annually, on a par with Trincomalee and Batticaloa. However, this can be raised to 10,000 MT, the level reached prior to the conflict. Around 15% of fish production is utilised for dry fish production, 5% for local consumption and the remaining 80% is transported to other districts.

The reduction in Mannar fish production not only directly impacts fishermen's livelihoods, but also affects private businesses like those dealing in lubricants, batteries and boat and outboard motor repairs, to name a few.

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the Mannar rice bowl.*



A lucrative business activity that has foreign exchange earning potential is the export of sea cucumber. A few businesses under the Chamber of Commerce are already engaged in sea cucumber processing. However, stronger private traders who have better export linkages tend to exploit the Mannar sea cucumber fishermen. It is a highly sought after commodity for Chinese food in Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan, Korea, Japan and China, as well as increasingly in Australia, Europe and America due to the growing Chinese food market there. Previously, the Southern coastal belt had potential in this, but it gradually waned. The sea cucumber is a highly valuable fish species, and depending on the type, it can fetch between Rs. 400 and Rs. 1,500 per animal. These fishermen ought to be assisted to gain direct access to this lucrative export market.

Some immediate constraints hamper the fishing industry in Mannar. If it is to pick up again quickly, improvements to the value chain and logistical capabilities need to come about.

Mannar and Vankalai have no cold storage facilities, which means that much of the catch goes off before it reaches its

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is a remarkable marine environment
with tremendous potential for fishing.*

market. In the 1960s, the Ceylon Fisheries Corporation focused on the production of ice and the provision of canning to take advantage of the large catches. It produced around 20 MT of ice and around 5,000 tins of fish daily. Production has only recently been restarted, but is still way below 1960 levels, and canned fish production has stopped completely. Only minor repairs are needed to restart an industry which would produce 40 MT of ice and 7,500 tins of fish daily, making around Rs. 100 million annually, excluding salaries for 200 people. Ice production is much too small to satisfy even current levels of fishing, and this has forced locals to bring ice in from outside.

Another urgent need for the fisheries sector in Mannar is a workshop and spare parts facility to repair outboard and fibre glass boats in operation there. Estimates indicate that there are around 3,000 fibre glass boats in active operation in Mannar, many of which have outboard motors. Of these, many require repair and tinkering on a daily basis. Due to the lack of such a facility, fisherman face interruptions to their livelihoods and loss of income, until such time as repairs are made and the boats are seaworthy. The Chamber of Commerce has suggested that the Government Agent could set aside a piece of land near the present fish market, and then an appropriate state agency, semi- or non-governmental organisation could set up the building. It would then be run by a private entrepreneur.

A major concern expressed by the fishing industry in Mannar is the intrusion of Indian trawlers into the seas off Mannar. They report that hundreds of Indian fishing trawlers enter Mannar seas on three nights a week and engage in extensive trawl net fishing, sweeping a large stock of Mannar's fish resources, particularly lucrative varieties like Béche-de-mer,

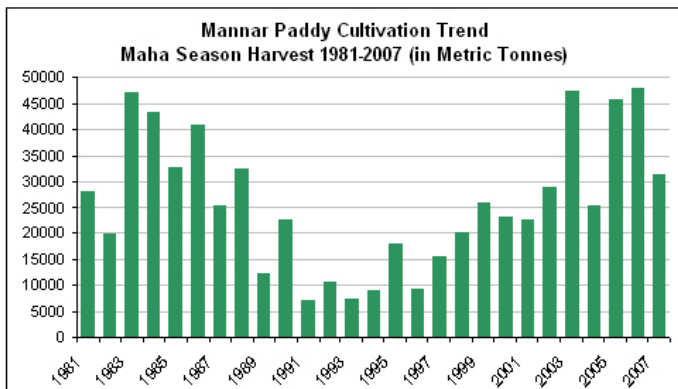
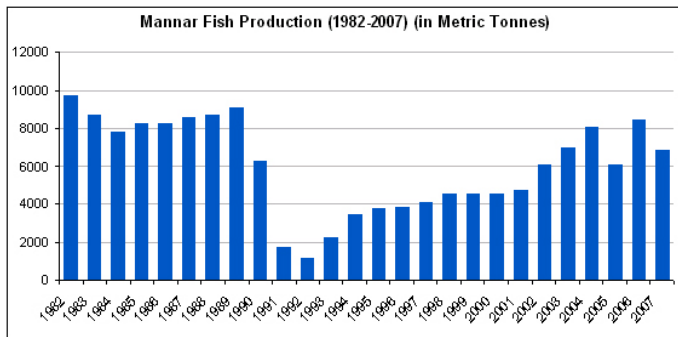
prawns and chunk. These trawlers also damage the drift nets used by local fisherman. Local fisherman complain that they are almost completely unable to engage in fishing for about three days in a week because the seas are taken over by Indian fishermen. This has led to regular confrontations between the two groups.

Meanwhile, seismic data has shown potential for around one billion barrels of oil under the sea off Sri Lanka's northwest coast, particularly in the Mannar Basin. Following several international roadshows, the Petroleum Ministry has called for bids from international oil companies for exploration of petroleum hydrocarbons in Blocks 2, 3 and 4 in the Mannar Basin. This first phase of the project is a 3,300 square kilometre area. Cairns Lanka Ltd, the local subsidiary of Cairns India Ltd, was the successful licensee to obtain Sri Lanka's first 'Petroleum Exploration License' for Block 2. It will commence exploration activities this year, with an investment of more than \$110 million. It will be nearly four years before the first barrel of oil is obtained, but this will certainly give Mannar an identity in the country's economic landscape.



Palmyrah and coconut trees are in abundance in the Mannar district. The large quantity of palmyrah toddy tapped daily in Mannar was much more than needed for local consumption. After studying the feasibility of commercialising this opportunity, UNDP has provided machinery worth around Rs. 5 million. However, marketing the product has become a problem owing to a bad odour emanating from it. According to reports, no technical expertise has been yet deployed to resolve this problem. Also, market linkages are needed to sell the produce. The Chamber of Commerce reports that the vinegar industry employed around 125 tappers and many more in the production phase, and around 2,000 bottles could be produced daily with the existing equipment.

Although the main livelihoods are in fishing and agriculture, prior to the conflict the industrial sector in Mannar was slowly growing. Apart from the two larger scale industries, the salt factory and the Pesalai fish processing centre, there were nearly 500 small and medium scale industries. With a little investment, these could also take off.



The Mannar saltern, under the Manthai Salt Corporation, produced around 4,000 MT of salt annually, but this is down by a third. It still supplies limited quantities to the fishing industry for dry fish production and ice manufacture. However, this far from meets demand and capacity needs to be increased. On this, Mr. Rex Culas noted that, 'to get salt production underway, a couple of small bunds need to be erected in the lagoon and a few water pumps need to be set up. This will cost around Rs. 1 million. As the site is along the main road, transport and other facilities are easily accessible.'

Standard clay is available in various parts of Mannar, particularly in Murunkan, and was once used as raw material by the KKS cement factory. There is potential for tile, brick and pottery industries as well.

Way forward

One of the biggest difficulties that was faced by Mannar residents and business people until recently was the lack of mobile phone and CDMA connectivity in the district. Even land phones were disconnected in many parts of the district except in Mannar town. As of last month, security restrictions on telecommunications have been lifted and full mobile phone and CDMA connectivity has been restored. Nevertheless, internet connectivity still exists only via dial-up, and businesses complain that it is extremely slow. Mannar needs broadband internet quickly, if its business sector is to revive.

Credit facilities are poor, with banks very hesitant to grant loans and overdraft facilities. This is largely due to the prevailing local situation, where business turnover is very poor and collateral is weak. Many farmers and fishermen as well as local businessmen urge the need for SME concessionary lending schemes to fill this gap in financing. Particularly to spur SME industrialists, a soft loan scheme could be introduced to encourage restarting of the 500 odd businesses that were in Mannar. Given the hesitation among banks to lend to

enterprises with poor turnover, this lending could be accompanied by some training in running an SME business.

Due to the years of conflict, the economic infrastructure in Mannar is very run down. Particularly in improving transport infrastructure, several projects are now underway. A major project recently concluded was the construction of a new Mannar bridge and the improvement of causeways and connecting roads by the Japan International Cooperation Agency. This will open up opportunities for the access of people and goods. The new Mannar bridge, rebuilt at a cost of \$19 million, will benefit over 50,000 people as it is the only connection between the mainland and Mannar Island.

The Chamber of Commerce remarks that the main constraint to business in Mannar is the restricted movement of goods beyond the Medawachchiya checkpoint and the delays and resultant increased costs due to cross-loading there. Once the security situation improves however, this constraint will surely ease.

A number of other initiatives are underway to improve the situation in the Mannar district. The Government spent nearly Rs. 1.7 billion in 2007 alone, mainly in agriculture, human settlements and transport infrastructure. Non-governmental organisations spent around Rs. 325 million in 2007, with nearly half of this going towards human settlements, but spending was also on social and economic infrastructure.

Given the inflow of IDPs to Vavuniya, with some of them being brought to Mannar as well, the focus will be on humanitarian efforts in the immediate weeks and months. However, it will be important to simultaneously engage the local farmers, fishermen and businessmen in understanding what they need fixed in order to revive the Mannar economy once more. Its rich natural resources, whether it be in fisheries or paddy, must be tapped. Focused efforts are needed to improve the various facilities to spur better marketing of, and higher earning from, this fish and agro produce.

***The Government spent nearly
Rs. 1.7 billion in 2007 alone,
mainly in agriculture, human settlements
and transport infrastructure.***



Chambers of Commerce visit Jaffna



A delegation of leading members of the Chambers of Commerce visited Jaffna in May to develop contacts between businesses in the North and companies from the rest of the country. They were also looking to identify opportunities for investment, and to see how the Chambers of Commerce based in the South could assist in resolving difficulties faced by their Jaffna colleagues.

Having met with key representatives of the Jaffna business community, including the Jaffna Chamber of Commerce, the Yarlpanam Chamber of Commerce and the People's Committee under the patronage of the Bishop of Jaffna, the delegation remarked on how repressed the local economy had become due to the conflict, pledging to help revive business in Jaffna and tap its full potential.

One of problems towards the resolution of which the delegation contributed was the high cost of transporting goods along the A9 highway. Colombo traders complain that they have to pay some Rs. 125,000 to send Government operated trucks each way. Meanwhile, it has been calculated that the same goods could be sent privately for as little as Rs. 50,000 or even Rs. 30,000. On their return to Colombo, the delegation took this up with the relevant policymakers, who decided to facilitate 100 private trucks to be used beyond the Medawachchiya checkpoint. This would further reduce prices in Jaffna, as well as making life easier for businesses in the peninsula to grow.

Another of the long standing challenges in Jaffna is running a business without reliable electricity. Although the situation is better than it was some years ago, power cuts of one and a half hours per day are still the norm, and this has obvious implications for the expansion of Jaffna industry. Fortunately, steps are being taken to address this, and a senior ministerial team was dispatched shortly after the delegation's visit to look into the matter. Testing is in progress and, from the end of this month, power cuts may be a thing of the past.

*'If I wanted to do business,
I would be on the next plane to Jaffna,
because the opportunities are great there.'*

- Jim Rogers

The Peace Secretariat was happy to assist in making the practical arrangements for the trip, as part of its ongoing efforts to support economic development in the conflict affected regions.

Director of Economic Affairs Rohantha Athukorala joined the delegation in Jaffna. Explaining the potential for growth in the peninsula, he said, 'In 1983, there were 754 SMEs in Jaffna, and now there are 34. The daily catch of fish exceeded 3,000 metric tonnes, which today has dropped to about 200. Meanwhile, only 30% of agricultural land is in use at the moment.' He highlighted the fruit and vegetable business, focused investment in fisheries, education related industries (software development, training etc.) and palmyra related industries as key areas for investment in the future. He went on to quote what the renowned global investor Jim Rogers said to Bloomberg: 'If I wanted to do business, I would be on the next plane to Jaffna, as the opportunities are great there.'

The Government has been working on plans to establish an Industrial Zone at Achchuveli, which Rohantha Athukorala pointed out would provide even greater incentives for the private sector to come into Jaffna. If that happened, he said, there was a good chance that the Jaffna economy would start to grow very quickly indeed, which was the best way of ensuring a sustainable peace in Sri Lanka.

Football brings youth together in Uva



Over the last two years, the Peace Secretariat, among other institutions, has promoted several initiatives to foster greater integration and connectivity between the East and other parts of the country. An example of this is the 'Peace through Sports' programme, which hopes to promote peace through interaction between young people.

In April, with the support of the Peace Secretariat, the Chief Minister of the Uva Provincial Council organised an inter-school sports festival for peace, in the multi-ethnic district of Badulla. Teams from Tamil, Muslim and Sinhalese backgrounds, and from a range of provinces, were brought together in the predominantly Muslim town of Megadama, to play against a team of talented young soccer players from the East of the island. Despite many years with little or no facilities, and no exposure to other teams, the Eastern team won every match. They then played several matches with the strong Uva team, which after a spirited game from both sides ended with a draw.

These sporting events provided not only much entertainment to local soccer fans and a challenging competition for players, but also an opportunity for strengthening communal harmony. With this in mind, the Uva Chief Minister provided board and lodging for the Eastern group, but also gave them the opportunity to visit sacred Buddhist places of worship like the

Teams from Tamil, Muslim and Sinhalese backgrounds, and from a range of provinces, were brought together to play against a team of talented young soccer players from the East of the Island.

Mahiyanganaya Viharaya and the Muthiyangana Raja Maha Viharaya. The visit continued with visits to Kovils and the main Mosque in Badulla, and the Muslim members of the team took Friday prayers in the Medagama Mosque.

The Provincial Director of Education, appreciating the potential of such exchanges, said that they were planning to select 30 students, both male and female, to undertake a friendly visit to the East very soon. She said this was a trip she hoped to do herself, having never been there before.

This event was yet another in a string of Peace Secretariat initiatives, both sporting and otherwise, intended to help catalyse peaceful relationships and understanding between youths of diverse ethnic, linguistic and regional backgrounds.