

South Asia

Major developments

At the end of 2004, UNHCR responded to the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster in Sri Lanka and in Aceh Province of Indonesia, drawing upon its emergency response capacity and experience to assist in this unprecedented natural disaster. UNHCR's involvement was part of a larger United Nations response, requested by the respective UN Country Teams.

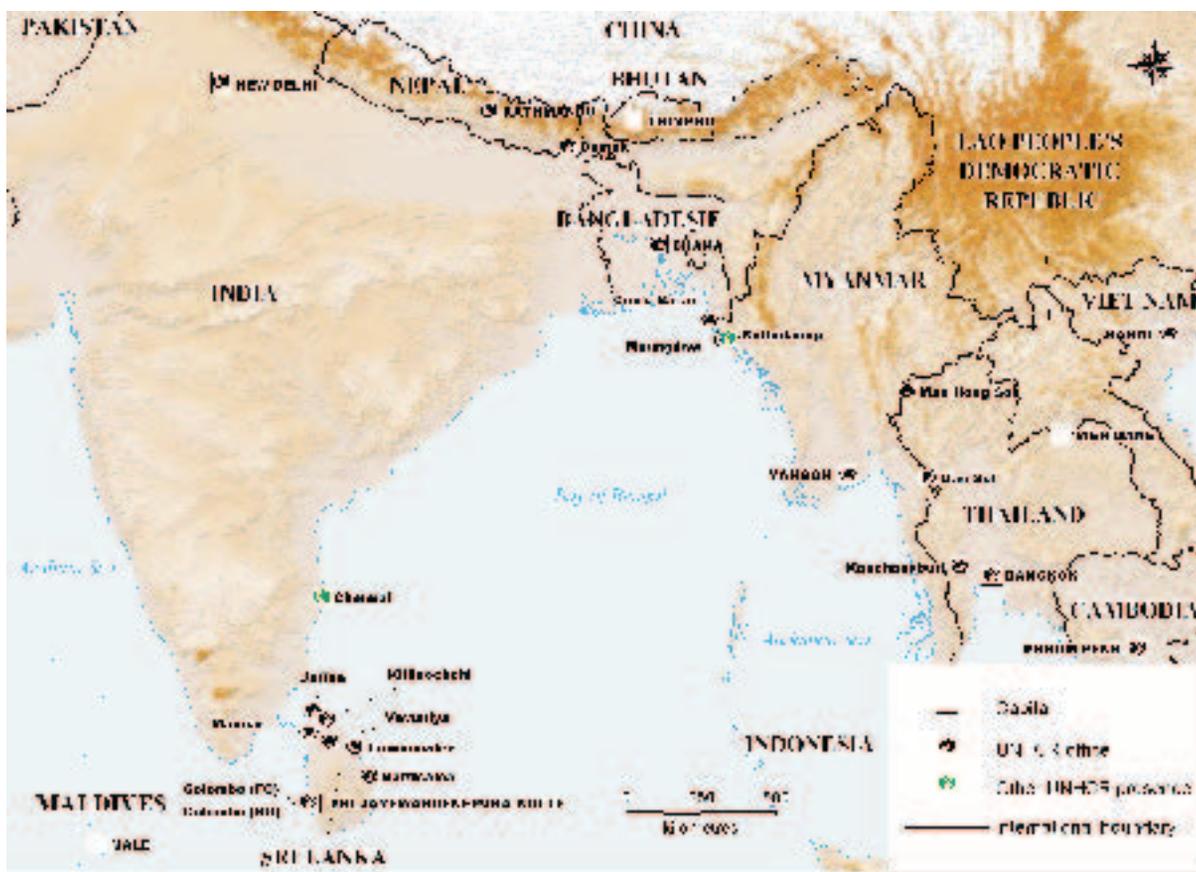
The protracted nature of the operation in Bangladesh has resulted in increased security problems in the camps. Some refugees who were dissatisfied with the refugee leaders and the Government's camp management system demanded a change of leadership. In June, refugees started strikes, boycotting education, community services and distribution of non-food items. The frustration culminated in clashes between police and refugees in November 2004, resulting in three deaths, more than 100 injuries and 37 arrests. When the security of UN staff was threatened, UNHCR suspended staff travel to the camps. This inevitably disrupted programme delivery. In late October 2004, security phase II was introduced for the entire district, limiting staff mobility.

Bangladesh

India

Nepal

Sri Lanka

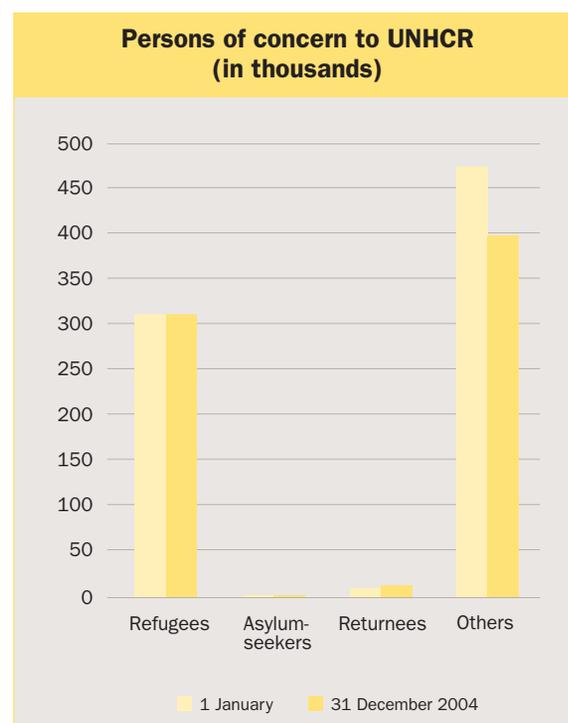


Challenges and concerns

During 2004, only a few hundred refugees in Bangladesh returned to Myanmar. In September 2004, the proposal for a self-reliance programme submitted by UNHCR to the Government of Bangladesh in 2003 was rejected. The Government insisted that such a programme should be pursued in the country of origin. UNHCR then proposed a new plan, which would give the refugees two options: to repatriate voluntarily with a revised return package enabling them to build their own accommodation in Myanmar and embark on income-generation activities; or to repatriate later and stay temporarily at a newly constructed semi-permanent shelter. The development of community-based programmes was also proposed, in order to facilitate the harmonious coexistence of refugees and the local population.

Although the repatriation of refugees in Nepal remains a possibility, efforts in 2004 to restart the bilateral process of negotiations between the Bhutanese and Nepalese Governments came to nothing. The first return movement, scheduled for February 2004, did not take place, and since the breakdown of the bilateral talks the overall prospect of voluntary return has remained confused. UNHCR continued to urge the Government to explore other avenues

towards solutions, including resettlement, as well as allowing UNHCR to carry out a re-registration/profiling of the camp population to better target assistance and identify solutions, while encouraging and awaiting the resumption of bilateral talks.



The security situation continued to deteriorate throughout Nepal as the Maoists stepped up their campaign. The major operational concern was the security of both staff and refugees. All sectors of society were affected by the insurgency. General strikes and blockades occasionally hampered UNHCR's operations and access to the seven camps. The deteriorating security environment increased frustration and vulnerability within the camps. The diminishing police presence in the camps led to concerns about the maintenance of law and order. It has become a high priority for UNHCR to bring to an end the protracted plight of the Bhutanese refugees. At both the 54th and 55th sessions of ExCom, the High Commissioner stressed the urgency of finding solutions for the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal and urged the exploration of all possible alternatives. UNHCR will continue to consult with the Governments concerned as well as with the international community on a way forward.

Although the ceasefire in Sri Lanka held, violations of human rights and other protection problems continued to emerge. A spate of violence in 2004 contributed to a general climate of fear, especially in the east. The forced recruitment of children and adults by the Tamil Tigers remains a key international concern, as more than 4,000 children have reportedly been abducted and forcibly recruited since the ceasefire. All these concerns impacted heavily on the IDP population in Sri Lanka. UNHCR took the view that conditions in the country still did not favour any large-scale, organized voluntary return operation.

Progress towards solutions

Progress towards durable solutions was limited in Nepal. The confrontation between refugees and the Bhutanese members of the Joint Verification Team in Khudunabari camp on 22 December 2003 and the ensuing breakdown of the verification exercise brought the repatriation process to a complete halt. Citing security concerns, Bhutan declared that it was not ready for continued verification exercises at other camps. UNHCR continued to advocate the need for a comprehensive solution to the problem encompassing all available options.

Despite the frozen peace negotiations and political uncertainty surrounding the 2004 elections in **Sri Lanka**, by the end of the year more than 379,000

IDPs and 12,000 refugees from India had spontaneously returned to their homes since the 2002 ceasefire. The year 2004 however witnessed fewer returns than in previous years, with a total of 33,700 IDPs reported. Durable solutions must still be found for some 353,000 IDPs and for approximately 61,000 refugees living in camps in Tamil Nadu, India as well as Sri Lankan asylum-seekers and refugees in other countries.

Operations

UNHCR operations in **Nepal** and **Sri Lanka** are described in separate country chapters.

At the end of 2004, some 20,300 refugees remained in the two camps in **Bangladesh**, almost 236,500 people having repatriated since the beginning of the operations in 1992. In 2003 the Myanmar Government lifted all the conditions which had previously disqualified some refugees from returning. Refugees are now able to return as long as the voluntariness of their return is officially confirmed. Enhanced protection capacity and monitoring have reduced reports of coerced repatriation. UNHCR worked closely with WFP on the provision and distribution of food rations. WHO and UNICEF also participated in camp activities related to the health and education programme. One international NGO, two local NGOs and Government Ministries implemented assistance activities. Working closely with the UN Country Team, UNHCR developed the Common Country Assessment, and made progress on the Millennium Development Goals and the UNDAF strategic documents.

Tibetans and Sri Lankan Tamils, the two largest refugee groups in **India**, fall under the responsibility of the Government. Meanwhile, UNHCR provides protection and assistance to over 11,000 recognized refugees, mainly from Afghanistan and Myanmar. In 2004, UNHCR facilitated the voluntary repatriation of some 3,000 refugees from Tamil Nadu State to Sri Lanka, in addition to 78 mandate refugees who were assisted to return to Afghanistan. A total of 423 refugees were resettled from India in 2004.

Despite the absence of a legal refugee framework in India, continued practical cooperation with the authorities allowed UNHCR to resolve several outstanding issues, including the renewal of almost 9,000 residence permits, keeping alive the



Bangladesh: Nearly 20,000 refugees in the camps rely on UNHCR for humanitarian assistance.

possibility of naturalization. There were no reported incidents of *refoulement*.

Refugees continued to have access to national institutions providing education and health care while UNHCR provided a basic safety net for vulnerable groups in need of financial and other forms of support. Able-bodied Myanmar refugees were phased out of eligibility for the subsistence allowance, as planned. This resulted in demands for resettlement and some reluctance to accept the self-reliance activities promoted by UNHCR.

Further progress was made in the mainstreaming of gender and age in practically all of UNHCR's protection and assistance activities: fast-tracking of vulnerable cases, including rape victims; gender-sensitive refugee status determination (RSD); gender and age-segregated population data; an emphasis on the increased enrolment of boys and girls not only in primary education but also lower/higher secondary education; emphasis on SGBV awareness and follow-up of SGBV cases; improving access to income generating activities for women in a secure environment.

Funding

Adequate funding was received for the subregion, enabling planned activities to be implemented without disruption.

Restricted voluntary contributions (USD)		
Earmarking ¹	Donor	Annual programme budget
Bangladesh		
	European Commission	1,184,834
	Japan	500,000
	United States of America	926,371
Sub-total		2,611,205
India		
	Japan	300,000
Sub-total		300,000
Nepal		
	European Commission	2,686,567
	Germany	304,507
	Japan	1,000,000
	Japan Association for UNHCR	15,741
	United States of America	200,000
Sub-total		4,206,815
South Asia		
	Norway	1,667,813
	United States of America	3,800,000
Sub-total		5,467,813
Sri Lanka		
	Denmark	376,432
	European Commission	1,537,814
	Japan	1,200,000
Sub-total		3,114,247
Total		15,700,079

¹ For more information on earmarking, please refer to the donor profiles.

Budget and expenditure (USD)		
Country	Revised budget	Expenditure
	Annual programme budget	
Bangladesh	2,812,721	2,810,676
India	3,479,483	3,378,773
Nepal	6,281,221	6,246,828
Sri Lanka	8,304,384	8,191,980
Total	20,877,809	20,628,257