

A woman wearing a light-colored headscarf and a patterned top is walking towards the camera, carrying two large metal water pots on a yoke across her shoulders. She is smiling. In the background, there are several tents made of white and grey fabric, suggesting a refugee camp. Other people are visible in the distance.

# South Asia

## Working environment

In 2006 there have been both positive and negative developments in the overall security environment and conditions of the displaced in the South Asia region. Despite a number of outstanding challenges, there is a sense of progress towards solutions to protracted situations.

In Nepal, the 107,000 refugees living in seven camps in the eastern part of the country saw some glimpses of a solution to their plight: progress was made on a refugee census and resettlement of vulnerable cases. Though some of that headway was lost in the political upheavals of April, a six-month truce between the Government and Maoist insurgents has given new impetus to the search for lasting solutions for this group.

Sri Lanka, however, appears poised once again on the edge of an open conflict. While the 2002 ceasefire has not been formally denounced by either side, its violation by both parties resulted in more than 1,000 deaths and the displacement of over 200,000 people. More than 15,000 Sri Lankan refugees arrived in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu in 2006.

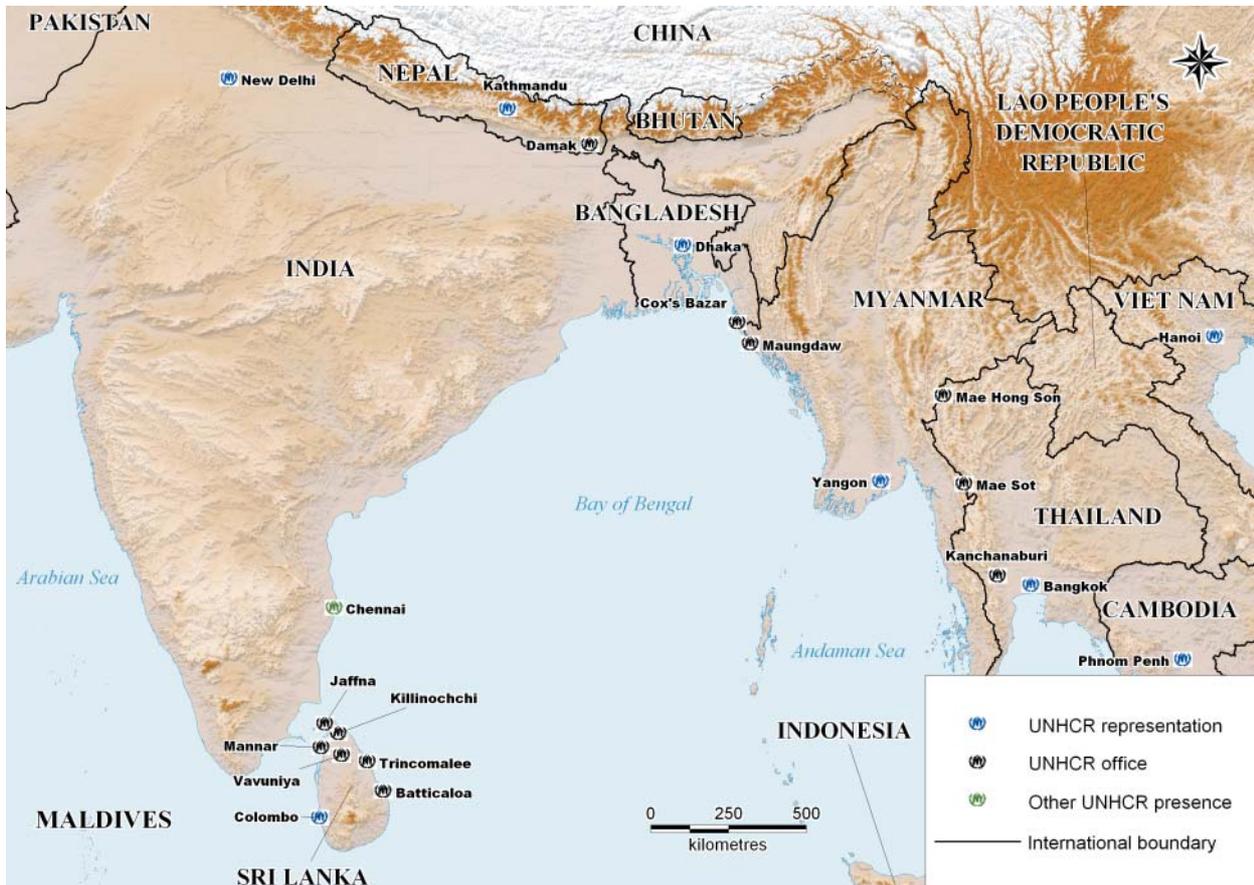
In India, meanwhile, the situation of urban refugees primarily from Afghanistan and Myanmar in New Delhi has deteriorated over the years. UNHCR has been encouraging more proactive engagement by resettlement countries. While the option of local integration for the majority of Afghan refugees seems in sight, those with protection needs will still require resettlement. The stream of asylum applications in 2006 continued at the

Bangladesh

India

Nepal

Sri Lanka



same rate as the year before (around 300), and no letup is expected in 2007. Refugees from Myanmar remain the largest refugee population in India. Palestinians who had been living in Iraq also began to arrive early in 2006.

In Bangladesh, UNHCR has refocused international attention on the worsening conditions for the refugees housed in two camps in the country. Intense negotiations with the Government resulted in an NGO that had been barred from the camps being allowed to return; furthermore, the Government has agreed to other NGOs and UN agencies working in the camps. However, with Bangladesh gearing up for elections in January 2007, refugee issues and forced displacement do not seem to attract much attention.

Repatriation movements have been halted since July 2005. Resettlement continues to be a solution for a few refugees only, and the Government of Bangladesh will not allow any form of self-reliance for Myanmar refugees in Cox's Bazar district.

## Strategy

UNHCR will respond effectively to any new displacement while actively promoting lasting solutions for refugees and others of concern in the region. Throughout Asia, the Office is focusing on solutions for protracted refugee situations. There are refugees who have lived in camps

for two decades in Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand. UNHCR believes it is not acceptable to consider these situations as open-ended assistance operations. At the same time, it has become clear that solutions cannot be found without the active involvement of the international community. In this regard, it is notable that in 2006, all three situations have benefited from the growing engagement of donor and resettlement countries.

The key objective is to improve the overall protection environment for refugees and asylum-seekers. At the same time, through implementation of the age, gender and diversity mainstreaming policy, UNHCR will work to meet the individual needs of refugee men, women and children.

In Bangladesh, UNHCR will strengthen its assistance, and will launch, together with the Government, a pilot programme to replace shelters that have become dilapidated over the past ten years. It will also seek the involvement of other actors, including sister UN agencies, in working with refugees as part of their development activities. Indeed, since 2006 the refugees have become a priority for the joint programming of the UN Country Team. A working group on refugees within the UN Country Team has been established, with refugees from the Northern Rakhine State (Myanmar) as one of its priorities. A UN technical mission to the Cox's Bazar region is expected to provide a blueprint for joint development that will raise the living standards surrounding the camps. Nonetheless, the camp population will still require international assistance. However, of all UN



Myanmar refugees in Bangladesh live in appalling conditions, like this makeshift camp in Teknaf, Cox's Bazar District.  
UNHCR / G.M.B. Akash

agencies, only UNHCR and WFP provide assistance and/or international protection to refugees from Myanmar. UNHCR hopes that other international or UN agencies will become involved whether with funding from UNHCR or from their own resources.

## Constraints

Deteriorating security and lack of access in Sri Lanka and elsewhere in the region, as well as an overall decline in funding for protracted refugee situations, remain key challenges. These will affect UNHCR's ability to meet immediate refugee needs, especially in the camps in Nepal and Bangladesh.

For the refugees in Nepal, there is little indication that there will be any substantive progress on the repatriation of at least those who were verified as eligible to return (600 people) in November 2005, and this will most likely pose a challenge to other durable solutions.

The absence of a national refugee protection regime and the lack of formal status of the Office in India are concerns, as this diminishes UNHCR's ability to identify and promote solutions for refugee populations.

UNHCR's overall funding for 2007 does not make provision for improvements to living conditions and skills training in the camps; however it is possible that efforts to involve other agencies will result in new programmes.

## Operations

UNHCR's operations in **Nepal** and **Sri Lanka** are covered in separate country chapters.

Some 28,000 refugees from Myanmar live in two camps in **Bangladesh**. The Government remains adamant that the only durable solution available for them is voluntary return to Myanmar. Refugees remain dependent on external support to cover their basic needs as they are not allowed to benefit from any self-reliance activities.

The successful completion of a verification exercise in the third quarter of 2006 will provide essential data to ensure protection and assistance are available to all, especially the most vulnerable. In addition, a joint UNHCR/WFP assessment mission has provided recommendations to address the root causes of malnutrition in these camps.

UNHCR's main activities will include facilitating a limited number of voluntary return movements;

promoting international standards of treatment and services in the refugee camps; promoting systematic registration, including of births, and provision of personal documentation; ensuring access to formal education for all children; and promoting activities empowering women. Refugees are involved in the planning process though their involvement in the delivery of assistance remains low.

For urban refugees, UNHCR will continue refugee status determination (RSD). Recognized refugees in urban areas will be helped to attain self-reliance. UNHCR will also continue to raise awareness among government officials of its mandate, including the protection of stateless people, as well as of refugee and human rights law. In particular, UNHCR will seek a solution for the 250,000 stateless Urdu-speaking people, known as Biharis, to ensure effective implementation of the Bangladeshi High Court's decision concerning their citizenship.

In **India**, UNHCR focuses on providing protection and assistance to some 11,000 urban refugees, most of them from Afghanistan and Myanmar. The Office will continue to pursue durable solutions for these refugees, focusing on resettlement. With the Government having been persuaded to accept naturalization as the solution for the Sikh and Hindu Afghan refugees, UNHCR will promote this process, which currently is hampered by

bureaucratic backlogs. The Office will continue to promote self-reliance activities designed to strengthen refugees' coping mechanisms and thereby reduce their dependence on UNHCR's assistance. Individual and family subsistence allowances are being gradually phased out, while vocational training has been offered to prepare refugees to seek employment.

Additionally, UNHCR has set up a protection clinic, providing a specialized venue for refugee women to discuss their concerns, particularly on domestic violence and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence.

UNHCR began to expand HIV/AIDS activities throughout the whole of Asia in 2005 with the appointment of a Senior Regional HIV/AIDS Coordinator. Activities have focussed on assessment of the HIV/AIDS situation of refugees, returnees and other persons of concern and on the provision of technical support. In 2007 UNHCR will strengthen and expand activities in key areas: preventing infection in health care settings; targeting prevention activities among groups at higher risk of infection; providing access to treatment for men with sexually transmitted infections; and strengthening HIV/AIDS-related surveillance, monitoring and evaluation. Refugees will be integrated into local, regional and national HIV/AIDS initiatives. Particular attention will be paid to reducing the vulnerability of refugee women and children to HIV infection.

Budget (USD)		
Country	Annual Programme Budget	
	2006	2007
Bangladesh	3,090,368	2,890,103
India	3,858,589	3,438,192
Nepal	6,865,442	6,975,643
Sri Lanka	8,827,990	7,331,779
Total	22,642,389	20,635,717

