

SOUTH ASIA

Bangladesh
Sri Lanka

India Myanmar

Nepal

Recent Developments

The search for solutions for protracted refugee situations in the South Asia region continued to be difficult. UNHCR's efforts to find solutions for Bhutanese refugees in Nepal and Muslim refugees from Myanmar in Bangladesh have yielded limited results. Renewed armed conflict in Sri Lanka led to an increase in the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Bi-lateral discussions between the Governments of Bhutan and Nepal on refugees in eastern Nepal made slow progress. In order to expedite the verification process of refugees, the High Commissioner visited the two countries in April-May 2000 and had high-level discussions with the authorities. A ministerial-level meeting between the concerned Governments in May resolved a number of outstanding issues relating to verification. Differences remain, however, regarding the 'family unit' which would be the basis for the verification. UNHCR proposed a formula to resolve this impasse and it is hoped that the verification of the refugees will commence at the earliest possible opportunity, in order to identify those who can return to Bhutan.

Since December 1999, the intensification of armed conflicts in the northern Jaffna Peninsula of Sri Lanka has impeded the reintegration of IDPs in the area and led to new population displacement. UNHCR re-prioritised its activities to respond to the new emergency situation. After hostilities shifted from the Vanni region to Jaffna this year, new opportunities emerged for the return and reintegration of IDPs in their places of origin in the Vanni.

Strategic Objectives: Progress and Constraints

UNHCR continued to provide protection and assistance to refugees and other persons of con-

cern, to enable them to live in safety and

have their basic needs met, while promoting repatriation as the primary durable solution. A key strategy in this effort was to raise awareness of refugee issues among governments, non-governmental organisations and civil society and promote partnerships with local institutions. Particular emphasis was placed on creating linkages with key institutions and disseminating refugee law.

A model national law on refugees and asylum-seekers was finalised at the Fifth Regional Consultations on Refugee and Migratory Movements in South Asia in 1998. The consultation is led by the Eminent Persons Group, which also contributed to the production of the model law. The Eminent Persons Group presented this law to individual governments in the region and conducted a variety of activities to promote its adoption.

UNHCR continued to assist 97,000 Bhutanese refugees in camps in Nepal and further promoted their involvement in camp management. This resulted in increased self-help activities by the refugees and reduced UNHCR's assistance delivery costs. In Nepal, UNHCR continued to assist Tibetan arrivals and facilitated their transit to third countries.

The repatriation to Myanmar of the remaining 22,500 Muslim refugees in Bangladesh continued to be slow due to difficulties in clearing those scheduled to return. Only some 900 refugees returned from Bangladesh during the first half of the year. The limited number of returns to Myanmar was offset by population growth in the refugee camps in Bangladesh. UNHCR continued to encourage bi-lateral discussions between the Governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar to accelerate the repatriation process. UNHCR succeeded in introducing some pro-



ductive activities in the refugee camps after discussions with the Bangladesh authorities.

In Myanmar, the timing and modalities for the handover of UNHCR activities for returnees in Northern Rakhine State to other UN agencies were modified. Following prolonged consultation among the UN country team, it was decided that the UN Integrated Development Plan, who had already been delayed, would not be pursued. Instead, a multi-sectoral assistance programme led by UNDP is being drawn up to start on 1 June 2001. UNHCR has therefore decided to maintain its presence in Northern Rakhine State until the end of 2001 and continue its assistance programme at a significantly reduced level.

In Sri Lanka, while UNHCR's primary objective remained the reintegration of IDPs in their place of origin or resettlement to new communities, adjustments were continuously made to cope with new population displacement caused by renewed armed conflict. The challenge for UNHCR was to quickly respond to new emergency situations while maintaining its ongoing

reintegration activities, minimising displacements and increasing the capacity of host communities to cope with new influxes.

Activities until 30 June

Reports on UNHCR activities in four countries in the region are described in separate chapters (i.e. **Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal and Sri Lanka**). In addition, UNHCR provides protection and assistance to urban refugees, mainly from Afghanistan, in India.

The High Commissioner visited **India** in May and had high-level discussions with the Government on a range of regional issues. The Indian authorities reaffirmed their support for UNHCR's activities and its initiatives in the region. India continued to host the largest urban refugee population in the region, comprising some 15,000 persons, mainly from Afghanistan. Conditions in Afghanistan did not allow for the large-scale voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees. A total of 312 Afghan refugees were resettled in third countries during the first six months of the year, but these departures were partly offset by new arrivals.

UNHCR provided needy refugees with assistance and refugee children received educational support.

Following discussions with the authorities, the residence permits of urban refugees were renewed in April, still for a limited period of time. This created a sense of uncertainty among the refugees and adversely affected UNHCR's efforts to promote self-sufficiency. UNHCR is in discussions with the authorities to expedite the renewal of these permits. Some 1,200 refugees from Sri Lanka arrived in the southern State of Tamil Nadu and were assisted by the Indian authorities in over 130 camps that accommodated 66,000 refugees from Sri Lanka.

A number of activities to promote the dissemination of refugee law were conducted in India, in collaboration with the National Human Rights Commission, the Indian Society of International Law and the National Law School of India University, where UNHCR has endowed a Chair in Refugee Law. With UNHCR support, a reader on refugee law has been produced. This will serve as teaching material for courses dealing with international law relating refugees and asylum-seekers in the region.

Outlook for July - December

The overall strategies and objectives for the South Asia region remain unchanged. UNHCR will make every effort to seek solutions for protracted refugee situations and expedite repatriation for Muslim refugees from Myanmar in Bangladesh and Bhutanese refugees in Nepal. Self-reliance activities and more active refugee involvement in camp management will be further promoted.

In Myanmar, efforts will focus on ensuring an early start of the UNDP-led assistance programme in Northern Rakhine State to ensure that there would be no gap in assistance activities upon UNHCR's phase out at the end of 2001.

UNHCR will continue supporting Regional Consultations on Refugee and Migratory Movements in South Asia and promoting the model national law to the States in the region. The Eminent Persons Group for South Asia will hold a meeting later in the year to assess the progress made and to discuss new initiatives to further raise awareness on refugee issues in the region.

FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

Countries	Initial Budget		Revised Budget		Total Funds Available*		Total Funds Obligated	
	AB and TF	SP	AB and TF	SP	AB and TF	SP	AB and TF	SP
Bangladesh	3'798'775	0	2'969'938	0	3'917'868	0	1'432'500	0
India	2'534'558	0	2'506'661	0	1'300'000	0	1'236'700	0
Myanmar	10'647'822	0	9'935'673	0	9'113'219	0	4'947'900	0
Nepal	5'429'264	0	5'414'206	0	2'848'276	0	2'628'700	0
Sri Lanka	5'666'663	0	5'675'781	0	4'141'525	0	2'320'300	0
Regional Projects	0	0	0	0	890'157	0	0	0
Sub-total	28'077'082	0	26'502'259	0	22'211'044	0	12'566'100	0
Bureau at Headquarters	1'180'600	0	1'152'528	0	526'414	0	526'414	0
TOTAL	29'257'682	0	27'654'787	0	22'737'458	0	13'092'514	0

*Includes income from unrestricted contributions, income from contributions restricted to the region and countries within the region, opening balance and adjustments.