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AUSTRALIA**

MRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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Questions

1. What is the current security situation in Trincomalee?

RESPONSE

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Note: A map of Sri Lanka can be found on page 30 of the latest International Crisis Group (ICG) report on Sri Lanka. This shows Trincomalee district as one of the three districts which comprise the Eastern Province (International Crisis Group 2009, *Development Assistance and Conflict in Sri Lanka: Lessons from the Eastern Province*, Asia Report N° 165, 16 April, p. 30 – Attachment 1).

Reports vary on the security situation in Trincomalee. The latest updates from the United Nations (UN) OCHA Sri Lanka Humanitarian Portal website state that the security situation in Trincomalee remains stable. The most recent update (1-15 June 2009) also states that “economic activity and travel has increased considerably, especially in and around Trincomalee town”. Travel warnings from the US Department of State and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) advise against travel to the Eastern Province, citing the possibility of renewed violence. Recent media articles report that: LTTE remnants are believed to have fled to Eastern Province towns, including Trincomalee, and the military is boosting its strength in these areas in response (*Agence France Presse*, 21 June 2009; *Daily News*, 18 June 2009); abductions, disappearances and unexplained killings are still being reported, although the numbers have significantly lessened compared to the same period last year (*Sunday Times*, 21 June 2009; *Xinhua News*, 16 June 2009); police are still unearthing caches of arms in Trincomalee (*Daily News*, 27 June 2009). A *Daily News* article and a *Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation*, both dated 28 June 2009, also report on UN and government initiatives for post-conflict development and skills training for the area (Inter-Agency Standing Committee 2009, ‘Sri Lanka: North East Joint Humanitarian Update – Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu, Mannar, Vavuniya, Trincomalee and Batticaloa districts’ *Report # 8*, 1-15 June 2009, Reliefweb, 25 June [http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2009.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/NSPR-7TCG4N-full_report.pdf/\\$File/full_report.pdf](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2009.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/NSPR-7TCG4N-full_report.pdf/$File/full_report.pdf) – Accessed 30 June 2009 – Attachment 2; ‘Travel Warning: Sri Lanka’ 2009, US Department of State website, updated 26 June http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_3011.html# – Accessed 30 June 2009 – Attachment 3; ‘Travel Advice: Sri Lanka’ 2009, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website, updated 22 June http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Sri_Lanka – Accessed 30 June 2009 – Attachment 4; ‘Sri Lanka steps up hunt for rebel remnants: report’

2009, *Agence France Presse*, 21 June – Attachment 5; Wijayapala, R. 2009, ‘A month since victory’, *Daily News*, 19 June <http://www.dailynews.lk/2009/06/19/sec03.asp> – Accessed 30 June 2009 – Attachment 6; Kirinde, C. 2009, ‘Abductions, disappearances and unexplained killings continue in North and East’, *Sunday Times*, 21 June http://www.sundaytimes.lk/090621/News/sundaytimesnews_18.html – Accessed 30 June 2009 – Attachment 7; ‘Sri Lanka’s east returns to normalcy: commission report’ 2009, *Xinhua News*, 16 June http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-06/16/content_11552222.htm – Accessed 30 June 2009 – Attachment 8; Jalaldeen, R. 2009, ‘Arms haul in Trincomalee’, *Daily News*, 27 June <http://www.dailynews.lk/2009/06/27/sec02.asp> – Accessed 30 June 2009 – Attachment 9; Rasooldeen, M. 2009, ‘New life after LTTE rout’, *Daily News*, 29 June <http://www.dailynews.lk/2009/06/29/news33.asp> – Accessed 30 June 2009 – Attachment 10; ‘The United Nations is to assist in the setting up of industries in the northern and eastern provinces’ 2009, *Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation*, 28 June <http://www.slbc.lk/index.php/component/content/article/1-latest-news/433-the-united-nations-is-to-assist-in-to-assist-in-the-setting-up-of-industries-in-the-northern-and-eastern-provinces> – Accessed 30 June 2009 – Attachment 11).

Recent reports

Fortnightly humanitarian updates on the situation in the north-east of Sri Lanka can be found on the United Nations (UN) OCHA Sri Lanka Humanitarian Portal website (see: http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/srilanka_hpsl/Catalogues.aspx?catID=1). The latest update, for the period 1-15 June 2009, has the following situation update on Trincomalee District. According to this, there were 9,080 IDPs in Trincomalee. The report states that the “security situation in Trincomalee District was stable” and “economic activity and travel has increased considerably, especially in and around Trincomalee town”:

- The security situation in Trincomalee District was stable. Security forces recovered ordnance in several parts of the District. Cordon and search operations and security checks at checkpoints are continuing.
- Since the liberation of the North economic activity and travel has increased considerably, especially in and around Trincomalee town, as well as traffic between Trincomalee and other districts.
- Following a visit of Senior Adviser to the President and MP Basil Rajapaksa to Trincomalee, the Government has eased fishing restrictions in the East. Fishermen are now allowed to fish during the day. Fishermen who use “Teppan” (a type of boat) are allowed to fish between 0400 – 1800 hours off the shores of Trincomalee District including Muttur. The 24 hour fishing ban off the Trincomalee harbor area has also been revised and fishermen are now allowed to fish in the area between 0400 – 1800 hours (Inter-Agency Standing Committee 2009, ‘Sri Lanka: North East Joint Humanitarian Update – Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu, Mannar, Vavuniya, Trincomalee and Batticaloa districts’ *Report # 8*, 1-15 June 2009, Reliefweb, 25 June [http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2009.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/NSPR-7TCG4N-full_report.pdf/\\$File/full_report.pdf](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2009.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/NSPR-7TCG4N-full_report.pdf/$File/full_report.pdf) – Accessed 30 June 2009 – Attachment 2).

The update for the previous period (16-31 May 2009) also states that “The security situation in [Trincomalee] District remains stable. Cordon and search operations and security checks at checkpoints continue” (Inter-Agency Standing Committee 2009, ‘Sri Lanka: North East Joint Humanitarian Update – Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu, Mannar, Vavuniya, Trincomalee and Batticaloa districts’ *Report # 7*, 16-31 May 2009, UN OCHA Humanitarian Portal website, 11 June http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/srilanka_hpsl/Files/Situation%20Reports/Joint%20Humanit

[arian%20Update/LKH0007_JHU_16-31%20May%202009.pdf](#) – Accessed 30 June 2009 – Attachment 12).

The US Department of State issued an updated travel warning for Sri Lanka on 26 June 2009. According to this information: there is the “possibility of renewed insurgency” in the Eastern Province; and “Armed paramilitaries remain active in the Eastern Province”:

On May 19, 2009, the Sri Lankan government announced that it had achieved victory over the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), an armed insurgent group, after more than 25 years of civil conflict. Despite the conclusion of hostilities, remnants of the insurgency group remain. The Government of Sri Lanka’s security posture remains heightened.

The Department of State urges American citizens to evaluate carefully the risks of travel to Sri Lanka and specifically warns Americans against travel to the Northern Province and most of the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka due to the presence of uncleared land mines and the possibility of renewed insurgency. Armed paramilitaries remain active in the Eastern Province. Consular assistance to American citizens detained in the north and east may be significantly delayed. Travel to all of the Northern Province remains potentially unsafe, in particular travel to the following areas: Anuradhapura District of the North Central Province; the areas north of Medawachchiya; the A14 road; and the road from Medawachchiya and Horowupatna. Non-official travel by U.S. Government personnel to the Eastern Province, other than the A6 road corridor and Trincomalee Town in Trincomalee District and areas in Ampara District south of the A4 road and west of Maha Oya, is prohibited. Travel in some parts of the country remains highly restricted by the Sri Lankan government, with particular sensitivity concerning the large number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in camps (‘Travel Warning: Sri Lanka’ 2009, US Department of State website, updated 26 June http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_3011.html# – Accessed 30 June 2009 – Attachment 3).

Likewise, the latest Sri Lanka travel advice on the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) website advises against travel to the Eastern Province, stating “The security situation in the Eastern Province remains tense and unpredictable. Tight controls continue to be implemented by the Sri Lankan security forces and paramilitary activity is widespread. Communal and inter-ethnic tensions in these regions are high and violence may erupt as a result. There is evidence of some continued LTTE activity in the east”. The advice was issued on 22 June 2009 (‘Travel Advice: Sri Lanka’ 2009, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website, updated 22 June http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Sri_Lanka – Accessed 30 June 2009 – Attachment 4).

Background report

For background and more in-depth information on Trincomalee, the latest ICG report on Sri Lanka looks at development and conflict in the Eastern Province. This report is dated 16 April 2009, prior to the Sri Lankan government claiming victory over the LTTE. The report indicates that the security situation has deteriorated in the East, although this is most marked in Batticaloa (International Crisis Group 2009, *Development Assistance and Conflict in Sri Lanka: Lessons from the Eastern Province*, Asia Report N° 165, 16 April – Attachment 1).

Recent Media

The following are a selection of recent articles reporting on Trincomalee. Articles report allegations that a small number of LTTE cadres may be operating in areas in the Eastern Province, and that security forces have been increased in response. Articles also report that the security situation has improved since last year, with the number of abductions,

disappearances and unexplained killings having dropped significantly compared to the same period last year. Job training and cricket training initiatives are also reported. The articles are presented mainly in reverse chronological order.

Daily News, 28 June 2009:

Foreign Employment Promotion and Labour Welfare Minister Keheliya Rambukwella sat down with Arab News recently to talk about Government priorities following the defeat of the Tigers.

“We want to give the members of the Tamil community jobs both inside and outside Sri Lanka since they have been victims of the war and they were practically immobilized in rebel-held territories in the North and East for a considerable period of time,” he said. “The LTTE perpetrated these heinous acts of carnage spanning well over three decades against peace-loving citizens.”

He said that the Government is in the process of opening migrant training centres in the recently freed areas. “Two such centres have been already opened in Jaffna, and Trincomalee,” he said.

These centres would train Tamil youths in a wide range of skills according to their aptitudes. “They can come out as white-collar workers, skilled labourers – such as masons, painters, welders, electricians and auto technicians – according to the needs of the local and international labour markets,” he added.

Following the training, the Minister said the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE) will consider them for placement in overseas stations and the local, private and the public sectors will also harness their talents for the country’s development (Rasooldeen, M. 2009, ‘New life after LTTE rout’, *Daily News*, 29 June <http://www.dailynews.lk/2009/06/29/news33.asp> – Accessed 30 June 2009 – Attachment 10).

Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation, 28 June 2009:

The United Nations Organisation for the Development of Industries is making arrangements to set up sophisticated and small scale industries in the northern and eastern provinces (‘The United Nations is to assist in the setting up of industries in the northern and eastern provinces’ 2009, *Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation*, 28 June <http://www.slbc.lk/index.php/component/content/article/1-latest-news/433-the-united-nations-is-to-assist-in-to-assist-in-the-setting-up-of-industries-in-the-northern-and-eastern-provinces> – Accessed 30 June 2009 – Attachment 11).

Daily News, 27 June 2009:

A special team from Trincomalee police recovered a stock of arms and ammunition on Thursday in Walathottam area, Trincomalee. Police spokesman SSP Ranjith Gunasekera said acting on information provided by LTTE suspects, police unearthed a cache of arms hidden by the LTTE in the Walathottam jungle patch (Jalaldeen, R. 2009, ‘Arms haul in Trincomalee’, *Daily News*, 27 June <http://www.dailynews.lk/2009/06/27/sec02.asp> – Accessed 30 June 2009 – Attachment 9).

Agence France Presse, 21 June 2009:

Sri Lanka is pouring more troops into former rebel-held areas in the east of the island to hunt down remnants of the Tamil Tigers following their defeat in the north, a state-run weekly said Sunday.

The military was boosting its strength in the east -- around the towns of Batticaloa, Trincomalee and Ampara -- to where some guerrillas are thought to have fled, the Sunday Observer said.

“The main concern of the army is to nab the remaining Tiger cadres now moving in the Eastern Province,” the paper said. “The Sri Lanka army is now taking measures to increase the strength in the east.”

There was no immediate comment from the military, which declines to discuss troops deployments publicly.

However, official sources confirmed that security forces have begun combing jungles in the east, and have already clashed with two groups of fighters from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The Tigers have admitted that they lost their top leader Velupillai Prabhakaran in a final battle last month, but the military believes that some lower-level cadres may still be in hiding and could try to regroup (‘Sri Lanka steps up hunt for rebel remnants: report’ 2009, *Agence France Presse*, 21 June – Attachment 5).

Sunday Times, 21 June 2009:

Abductions, disappearances and unexplained killings continue to be reported from the North and the East, although there has been a drop in the number of such incidents, according to the Presidential Commission on Disappearances.

Between January 1 and May 31 this year, a total of 459 such cases were reported by the 63 police stations in the North and the East – 128 incidents in the North and 331 in the East.

Batticaloa continued to be the most badly affected, with 129 disappearances, 32 abductions, 15 unexplained killings and three unidentified bodies. The Wannai district followed with 40 abductions, 34 disappearances, two unexplained killings and an unidentified dead body.

Forty-nine such cases were reported from the Trincomalee district, 87 from Ampara, 24 from Mannar, 13 from Kantalai, and 12 from Jaffna.

T. A. Mahanama Tilakaratne, retired High Court judge and chairman of the Presidential Commission on Disappearances, recently summoned senior police officers and district and divisional secretaries to personally report on the law and order situation in the East, and the state of civil administration in areas liberated from LTTE control.

The reports suggested that life in the Ampara district had returned to normal, while civil administration was reaching a satisfactory level in Trincomalee (Kirinde, C. 2009, ‘Abductions, disappearances and unexplained killings continue in North and East’, *Sunday Times*, 21 June http://www.sundaytimes.lk/090621/News/sundaytimesnews_18.html – Accessed 30 June 2009 – Attachment 7).

Daily News, 19 June 2009:

Whilst search operations were going on in Colombo the military is still running after Tiger leader Nagulan and Kuilan operating in Batticaloa and Trincomalee along with a handful of Tiger cadres. Military officials believe that they have already moved into the civilian settlement in the East as intense search operations conducted by the Security Forces have made it difficult for them to operate in the jungles (Wijayapala, R. 2009, ‘A month since

victory', *Daily News*, 19 June <http://www.dailynews.lk/2009/06/19/sec03.asp> – Accessed 30 June 2009 – Attachment 6).

Xinhua News, 16 June 2009:

Sri Lanka's once troubled Eastern Province has reached near normalcy with a drastic drop of disappearances of people and fewer security road blocks, a one-man commission reported here Tuesday

The retired judge Mahanama Thilakaratna, who heads a one-man commission of Inquiry to look into disappearances, abductions and murders, told reporters that rights violations in the Eastern Province had recorded a drop of around 90 to 95 percent this year compared with Jan-May period of 2008.

"Armed groups joining democracy, closer co-operation between such groups have contributed to this situation," Thilakaratna said.

There is general public view that law stands above all things else, Thilakaratna said.

He said in Trincomalee district except for two road blocks, all others had been removed leading to near normalization.

But in the Batticaloa district it had been difficult to remove the road blocks yet, Thilakaratna said.

He said the general situation in the east had drastically improved since the provincial election of May last year.

The militant group TMVP (Tamil Peoples Liberation Tiger) which broke away from the former Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) gained control of Eastern Province Council.

The government troops evicted the LTTE from the east in 2007 which was the prelude to the Army gaining control of the entire Tamil Tiger held regions.

The LTTE were completely crushed by the government troops last month with all their 15,000-sq-km territory being recaptured by the troops and almost all LTTE fighters being killed ('Sri Lanka's east returns to normalcy: commission report' 2009, *Xinhua News*, 16 June http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-06/16/content_11552222.htm – Accessed 30 June 2009 – Attachment 8).

The Australian, 1 June 2009:

The Government is seeking to purge separatist "sleeper cells" and sympathisers.

In the wake of President Mahinda Rajapakse's declaration of victory over the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam last month, Sinhalese Sri Lankans danced and waved the national flag, which bears the Sinhalese lion.

Most Tamils stayed behind closed doors. In the town of **Trincomalee** -- part of the eastern province liberated from the Tigers in 2007 -- reports emerged of bashings and of Tamil families and businesses being obliged to donate money for a celebration feast.

“There’s going to be a lot of people vulnerable to denunciations as Tamil Tigers, and it’s almost certain that process is already under way, which is one reason why it’s essential -- but unlikely -- that the Government will make the (refugee) camps open to independent eyes,” International Crisis Group Sri Lanka analyst Alan Keenan said.

...The problem for hundreds of thousands of Tamils from the north is they all fall under suspicion simply for having lived in LTTE-held territory.

Rights campaigners and aid workers have reported large numbers of people, including at least 80 former LTTE child soldiers, have gone missing from internment camps in the northeast, which now house more than 280,000 displaced people. “The problem in this country is terror and impunity,” an exhausted aid worker said. “There are never investigations.”

An eastern-based health official told The Australian he was fielding 20 inquiries a day from people looking for family members they believed had been forcibly interned in the camps while the Government weeds out rebel soldiers.

In **Trincomalee** district last year, one of three that make up the eastern province, 97 people were reported missing. Many are suspected victims of rival Tamil paramilitary groups.

...The Government says it is committed to demining and rebuilding the north, and releasing the bulk of people from camps within 180 days.

The Sri Lankan army announced plans this week to bolster its 200,000-strong force with an additional 100,000 troops to crush the remaining Tiger rebellion and oversee the redevelopment process, prompting accusations the Government was planning an “army of occupation” in the north.

...Observers fear the Government will see the mass displacement of Tamils as an opportunity to change the demographics of the north by offering incentives to Sinhalese people.

...Sri Lankan Foreign Secretary Palitha Kohona, a former envoy to Australia, dismisses such talk as the “accusations of interested parties who just want to continue churning the pot”.

“Fifty-four per cent of Tamil people in this country made a decision to leave their homelands (in the north and east),” he said.

Reprisals and disappearances did occur in the east after liberation, he concedes, but such violence was a thing of the past (Hodge, A. 2009, ‘Tamils fear bout of ethnic cleansing’, *The Australian*, 1 June – Attachment 13).

The Sunday Times, 7 June 2009, reports on Sri Lanka Cricket plans for Jaffna and Trincomalee:

Now its rehabilitation time for the once troubled zone. Sri Lanka Cricket is there in a big way to infuse the cricket madness once again to the North and the East.

A team led by the SLC Interim Committee Chairman D.S. de Silva has already made two visits – one to the Jaffna peninsula and the other to the Trincomalee area – to distribute cricket goods and to ascertain how well and how soon the game could be developed in these two areas.

Commenting on their latest mission, Sri Lanka Cricket Interim Committee Secretary

Nishantha Ranatunga said, “It’s like taking cricket to China. As a result of years of negligence, there is little or no infrastructure in most of the places and we have to start from scratch.”

The SLC secretary said children in these areas had not been playing the game. “So we have to take one step at a time. As an initial step, we have decided to give softball cricket equipment to some of the centres and once they are back in the fold, the talented players will be gradually brought to the hard ball stream (Pathiravithana, S. 2009, ‘Cricket goes to cleared areas’, *Sunday Times*, 7 June <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/090607/Sports/sp200.html> – Accessed 30 June 2009 – Attachment 14).

List of Sources Consulted

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BACIS (DIAC Country Information database)

REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)

ISYS (RRT Research & Information database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)

RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments

1. International Crisis Group 2009, *Development Assistance and Conflict in Sri Lanka: Lessons from the Eastern Province*, Asia Report N° 165, 16 April.
2. Inter-Agency Standing Committee 2009, ‘Sri Lanka: North East Joint Humanitarian Update – Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu, Mannar, Vavuniya, Trincomalee and Batticaloa districts’ *Report # 8*, 1-15 June 2009, Reliefweb, 25 June [http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2009.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/NSPR-7TCG4N-full_report.pdf/\\$File/full_report.pdf](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2009.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/NSPR-7TCG4N-full_report.pdf/$File/full_report.pdf) – - Accessed 30 June 2009.
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