



**Students of Indian origin** in their school at  
Kotagala, Chrysler's Farm tea estate, Sri Lanka

**Bangladesh**

**India**

**Nepal**

**Sri Lanka**

# South Asia

A close-up portrait of a young girl with dark skin and hair styled in two braids. She has a red bindi on her forehead and is wearing small gold earrings. She is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be an indoor setting with warm lighting.

## | OPERATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS |

- In Nepal, UNHCR and the Government, with the strong support of a group of interested countries, searched for solutions for more than 100,000 long-staying refugees. Key achievements in 2008 were the start of group resettlement for those refugees who wished to accept this durable solution, a decline in violence by anti-resettlement groups and a consequent improvement in security.
- In Bangladesh, UNHCR cooperated with the interim Government, the UN Country Team and a steering group of engaged stakeholders to improve camp conditions and search for durable solutions for 28,300 refugees from Myanmar's northern Rakhine State.
- The number of asylum-seekers in India increased sharply. While assessing the possible role of the resettlement programme as a pull factor, UNHCR reconsidered available solutions for each population group. Local integration through citizenship for Hindu and Sikh refugees from Afghanistan proceeded at a slower pace than expected.
- UNHCR led the collective humanitarian response in a difficult security environment in Sri Lanka, which saw much displacement in the north of the country as military operations there were intensified. By the end of the year, the progress of the Sri Lankan Army and the retreat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to a smaller geographical area aggravated the situation. An estimated 150,000 civilians were trapped by the hostilities, with limited access to humanitarian aid and no chance to move to safer locations. At the same time in the east, UNHCR monitored the protection of 20,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and assisted them to return to their homes. Throughout the year, the total number of IDPs in Sri Lanka stood at more than 500,000.





### | Working environment |

Despite several significant political developments in Nepal, including a universally elected Constituent Assembly and the proclamation of a federal democratic republic, the prospects for stability are still uncertain. This was demonstrated by continuing tensions between and within political parties, the unresolved integration of previously warring parties and intensified protests by minority groups in the southern Terai region.

The caretaker Government in Bangladesh concluded its mandate with the most peaceful elections in the country's history, which were held on 29 December. Its appointment of independent, competent and uncontroversial leadership was an important step in laying the foundation for sustainable democracy. The stable situation in the country enabled UNHCR to establish a stronger dialogue with its governmental counterparts.

UNHCR held high-level bilateral talks with the Government of India in January. Various refugee, mixed-migration and global issues were discussed, with a focus on exploring new areas of collaboration.

Given the security situation in Sri Lanka, in September UNHCR, other UN Agencies and NGOs were requested to evacuate Kilinochchi and move to Vavuniya, with the latter becoming a new hub for humanitarian action.

### | Achievements and impact |

The cooperation of the Nepalese Government and the support of a core group of countries committed to finding durable solutions for refugees in Nepal allowed the start of

large-scale resettlement of camp-based refugees. Some 8,000 refugees left for third countries in 2008. The Government's proactive engagement allowed for a secure environment in the camps. This enabled refugees to access information on resettlement and other durable solutions provided by UNHCR and its partners, and to make free and informed decisions.

UNHCR strengthened its partnership with the Government of India, and pursued discussions on protection delivery and a future national legal framework. It is hoped that work on the framework will advance following the 2009 federal elections.

Living conditions started to improve for the 28,300 refugees from Myanmar living in two camps in Bangladesh, particularly in the areas of shelter, health, skills training, education and community mobilization. UNHCR and its partners completed projects to improve water supply and sanitation. They also ensured better access to primary and secondary health care in both camps. The construction of new shelters for refugees in Kutupalong camp was completed and, subject to continued funding, rehabilitation in Nayapara which started in 2008 is expected to be finished by the end of 2009. Some 100 refugees departed for resettlement in third countries.

In Sri Lanka, UNHCR's field presence and protection work, including extensive monitoring and advocacy, helped to uphold the rights of IDPs and ensure the voluntary nature of returns to the east. More than 9,100 people received legal assistance. Training and awareness-raising events boosted the capacity of national entities and NGOs and helped reduce the risk of sexual and gender-based violence. Capacity-building for camp management actors enabled

better identification of protection and assistance needs.

In the north, emergency humanitarian assistance (in particular emergency shelter and non-food items) was provided to support the efforts of the authorities to assist the IDPs. The Office led and coordinated the development of guidelines on the treatment of IDPs from the LTTE-controlled areas. UNHCR advocated strongly with the Government for adherence to the guidelines. Monitoring and protection interventions proved vital for ensuring proper treatment of IDPs in the north, and voluntary and safe return movements.

## | Constraints |

In Nepal, the start of large-scale resettlement presented a particular challenge for the maintenance of services in the camps, which have been managed for the past 18 years by qualified and experienced refugee workers. The generally unstable national context affected UNHCR operations, delaying project implementation and increasing costs.

The protracted nature of the refugee situation in the camps in Bangladesh remained a major concern. Assessments in the camps revealed a continued need to build community management capacity through refugee mobilization and intensive skills training. High levels of illiteracy and innumeracy will need to be overcome to provide the refugees with more opportunities for self-reliance.

In India, in the absence of a national legislative framework, the Government continued to provide protection to different refugee population groups, using differentiated approaches. However, refugees and asylum-seekers in the country faced increasing problems due to rising prices for basic commodities and housing, difficulties with regularizing their stay and discrimination by local communities. Unfulfilled and unrealistic resettlement expectations among the refugees also led to security incidents at the UNHCR office.

In Sri Lanka, in addition to evacuation from the Vanni, security measures, the frequent closure of crossing points, curfews, the presence of land mines, complex clearance procedures and restricted access to the population in the LTTE-controlled part of the Vanni all hampered the Office's planned activities.

## | Operations |

The operations in **Nepal, Bangladesh** and **Sri Lanka** are covered in separate chapters.

In **India**, the rise in the number of arrivals of asylum-seekers stretched UNHCR's capacity to address their concerns in a timely and efficient manner, compelling the Office to initiate a review of its procedures. At the end of

2008 there were almost 3,800 pending applications.

Additional resources were allocated to reduce the backlog in 2009. More adjustments will be necessary to avoid a new backlog as the number of new arrivals continues to increase.

Simultaneously, some 1,100 urban refugees departed for resettlement from India in 2008, a nearly two-fold increase from the previous year. Almost all those resettled were refugees from Myanmar (627), Afghanistan (313) and Palestinian refugees formerly residing in Iraq (123).

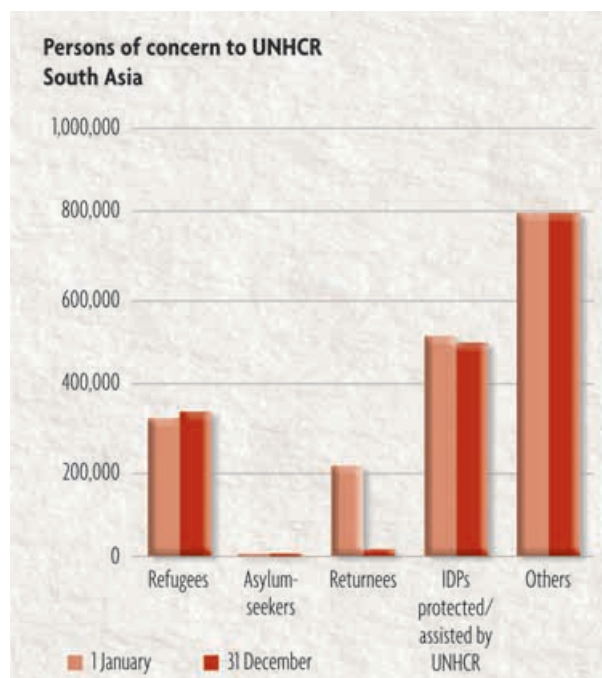
The Office worked on improving protection through the Women's Protection Clinic and the Protection Panel.

Despite a sustained information campaign, less than half of the approximately 7,700 Afghan refugees of Hindu and Sikh origin in India expressed interest in naturalization. To date, 282 persons have been granted Indian citizenship. Only nine individuals opted to repatriate voluntarily to Afghanistan.

UNHCR's involvement with the Sri Lankan refugees hosted in 116 camps was limited to the dissemination of information on conditions in Sri Lanka and support for voluntary repatriation. In 2008, 106 refugees returned home voluntarily under UNHCR's auspices.

## | Financial information |

After the austerity measures introduced in 2006, UNHCR's budget for South Asia continued to increase significantly in 2008. While administrative costs remained stable, operational expenses went up. Additional resources allowed for special projects in priority areas in all countries in South Asia.



Budget and expenditure in South Asia (USD)						
South Asia	Final budget			Expenditure		
	Annual budget	Supplementary budget	Total	Annual budget	Supplementary budget	Total
Bangladesh	6,876,034	294,010	7,170,044	6,657,077	205,698	6,862,775
India	4,502,645	0	4,502,645	4,204,109	0	4,204,109
Nepal	11,542,864	253,000	11,795,864	10,849,696	108,523	10,958,219
Sri Lanka	20,853,512	616,200	21,469,712	19,600,639	523,080	20,123,719
<b>Total</b>	<b>43,775,055</b>	<b>1,163,210</b>	<b>44,938,265</b>	<b>41,311,521</b>	<b>837,302</b>	<b>42,148,823</b>

Note: Excludes indirect support costs that are recovered from contributions against supplementary programmes and the "New or additional activities – mandate-related" (NAM) reserve.

Voluntary contributions to South Asia (USD)				
Earmarking	Donor	Annual Budget	Supplementary Budget	Total
<b>Bangladesh</b>	Australia	1,339,344		1,339,344
	European Commission	3,792,544		3,792,544
	Italy	155,521		155,521
	Japan Association for UNHCR	15,000		15,000
	The Sunmoon Peace Football Foundation (Republic of Korea)	30,000		30,000
	United States of America	1,064,761		1,064,761
<b>Bangladesh Subtotal</b>		<b>6,397,170</b>		<b>6,397,170</b>
<b>India</b>	Australia	92,000		92,000
	Australia for UNHCR	475		475
	United States of America	1,463,901		1,463,901
<b>India Subtotal</b>		<b>1,556,376</b>		<b>1,556,376</b>
<b>Nepal</b>	Australia	325,581		325,581
	CERF	500,852		500,852
	European Commission	2,332,815		2,332,815
	Japan	1,800,000		1,800,000
	New Zealand	4,065		4,065
	Private donors in Canada	9,872		9,872
	Japan Association for UNHCR	148,331		148,331
	Foundation FC Barcelona (Spain)	70,000		70,000
	United Kingdom	163,056		163,056
	United States of America	3,766,579		3,766,579
<b>Nepal Subtotal</b>		<b>9,121,151</b>		<b>9,121,151</b>
<b>Sri Lanka</b>	Australia	3,106,618		3,106,618
	CERF	2,831,400		2,831,400
	European Commission	3,015,596		3,015,596
	Germany	788,644		788,644
	Italy		313,425	313,425
	Japan	1,000,000		1,000,000
	Netherlands	1,351,000		1,351,000
	Norway	1,305,970		1,305,970
	Japan Association for UNHCR	11,515		11,515
	Private donors in Sri Lanka	4,599		4,599
	Switzerland	250,752		250,752
	United States of America	3,590,000		3,590,000
<b>Sri Lanka Subtotal</b>		<b>17,256,093</b>	<b>313,425</b>	<b>17,569,518</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>34,330,789</b>	<b>313,425</b>	<b>34,644,214</b>

Note: Contributions shown exclude indirect support costs that are recovered from contributions against supplementary programmes and the "New or additional activities - mandate related" (NAM) Reserve.