

South Asia

Recent Developments

In 2001, one of two welcome developments for UNHCR in the region was the joint verification of Bhutanese refugees in one of the seven camps in Nepal in March 2001. This grew out of the agreement reached at the 10th Ministerial meeting between Bhutan and Nepal in December 2000. The process was then taken forward by the 11th bilateral meeting in Thimphu, Bhutan in August 2001. It was decided that a meeting at Foreign Secretary level should be held to resolve the remaining issue of the categorisation of the refugees in the camps before decisions are made on their eligibility for return. It is hoped that the voluntary repatriation of refugees can be achieved in the course of 2002. Pending durable solutions, UNHCR continues to provide protection and assistance to the refugees in all camps.

The other welcome development was the announcement by the Indian authorities in September 2001 of the renewal of residence permits for Afghan refugees, thus securing their protection and welfare. For the previous three years, the renewal or issuance of permits had been suspended. This had made the refugees more vulnerable, although their stay had been generally tolerated.

UNHCR continued efforts to facilitate the involvement of longer-term development agencies in Northern Rakhine State in Myanmar, but this was, and is still difficult due to lack of support from the authorities.

The security situation remains tense in Sri Lanka due to the continuing conflict between the Government of Sri Lanka and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). There were no major population movements comparable to those during the previous year. UNHCR's activities in Mallavi in the LTTE-dominated area have been suspended since July 2001 for security reasons.

Strategic Objectives

UNHCR will continue to actively promote lasting solutions for refugees in the region. Pending such solutions, UNHCR's primary objective is to provide protection and assistance to refugees and others of concern, with particular attention to the needs of vulnerable groups.



Bangladesh
India
Myanmar
Nepal
Sri Lanka



UNHCR continues to review the operations in the region with a view to facilitating solutions for protracted refugee situations. UNHCR will focus in particular on the voluntary return to Myanmar of the remaining refugees in Bangladesh.

UNHCR's efforts to improve the quality of asylum will be supported by the activities of the Regional Consultations on Refugee and Migratory Movements in South Asia, conducted by the Eminent Persons Group (EPG). UNHCR and EPG have drafted a model law on refugees and asylum-seekers, and will continue to promote the adoption of national legislation by States in the region.

Operations

UNHCR conducts operations in five countries in the region, **Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Sri Lanka** (for **Nepal and Sri Lanka** please see separate country chapters).

The repatriation of refugees from **Bangladesh** to Myanmar has been slow and halting owing to the lengthy clearance process required of those scheduled to return, and the complicated nature of residual cases. In 2001, to reactivate this return process, UNHCR renewed its last efforts to engage in

dialogue with both Governments. Bearing in mind that not all remaining refugees are able to return to Myanmar, UNHCR will continue to discuss with the Bangladeshi authorities the possibility of interim solutions for this group of refugees. Some productive activities will continue to be implemented in order to prepare the refugees for self-reliance regardless of the type of durable solution available to them. Meanwhile, UNHCR continues to provide basic care and maintenance for some 21,800 Myanmar refugees pending a durable solution.

In **India**, UNHCR will provide protection and assistance for 11,800 urban refugees, mainly from Afghanistan. India continues to host the largest urban refugee population in the region, roughly 90 per cent of whom are from Afghanistan. Return to Afghanistan is at present impossible. UNHCR will continue to explore the possibility of local integration of some eligible refugees through naturalisation. Afghans of Indian origin who have legally entered and stayed in India for more than ten years should qualify for Indian nationality under the relevant laws. UNHCR also provides a basic subsistence allowance for needy refugees, a social welfare safety net for extremely vulnerable individuals, and access to primary healthcare and education. A strategic review has been initiated and will continue



India: Income-generating activities by refugees in New-Delhi. UNHCR/B. Neelemann.

to explore ways of increasing the self-reliance and self-esteem of refugees during their lengthy stay in India. The situation in Sri Lanka still militates against the return of significant numbers of Tamil refugees accommodated in the southern Indian State of Tamil Nadu, where India hosts 64,700 Sri Lankan refugees in 116 refugee camps.

In Northern Rakhine State in Myanmar, UNHCR's activities will be geared towards the reintegration of approximately 235,000 returnees and the stabilisation of a vulnerable population of a similar size. Stabilisation entails efforts to reduce the likelihood of renewed population movement. UNHCR implements multi-sectoral activities in order to make the population more economically viable and to build up the coping mechanisms of those who live in a difficult environment. The key underlining theme of UNHCR's activities is confidence, leading to trust, between the returnees and the rest of Myanmar (and likewise for the vulnerable population). Gender issues receive special attention. UNHCR continues to

promote the involvement of development agencies in Northern Rakhine State in an effort to ensure that reintegration efforts are sustained.

BUDGET (USD)	
Country	Annual Programme
Bangladesh	2,595,166
India	2,825,727
Myanmar	3,649,062
Nepal	5,760,044
Sri Lanka	6,590,176
Regional Activities ¹	80,000
Total	21,500,175

¹Includes dissemination of refugee law in South Asia.