



South Asia

Major developments

The year 2005 was marked by political turmoil and deteriorating security in the South Asia region. In Sri Lanka, the assassination of the Foreign Minister in August posed a serious threat to general security. Intermittent breaches of the cease-fire brokered between the Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), politically-motivated killings and inter-ethnic violence caused serious tension in the North and East of the country.

A state of emergency was declared in Nepal early in the year when the King dismissed the Government and assumed direct powers, a move widely condemned by the international community. The strained relationship between the Government and opposition parties, coupled with an increased insurgency, dragged the country into further turmoil and worse violence. As the conflict between the Government and rebels persisted, the situation in the refugee camps in Nepal continued to deteriorate. Among refugees, a sense of frustration turned to hopelessness, generalized anxiety, depression and suicidal behaviour. Certain refugee groups made attempts to return to Bhutan via India. During the year, a total of six attempts were made, the last in December 2005 when over 1,000 Bhutanese gathered at the Mechi Bridge, which separates Nepal from India, holding banners proclaiming their right to return.

Bangladesh also witnessed a deterioration in security when, in August 2005, over 40 bombs exploded simultaneously throughout the country, most of them targeting civilian government institutions.

Donors and operational partners agree that UNHCR played a pivotal role in assisting the Government of Sri Lanka to

Bangladesh

India

Nepal

Sri Lanka

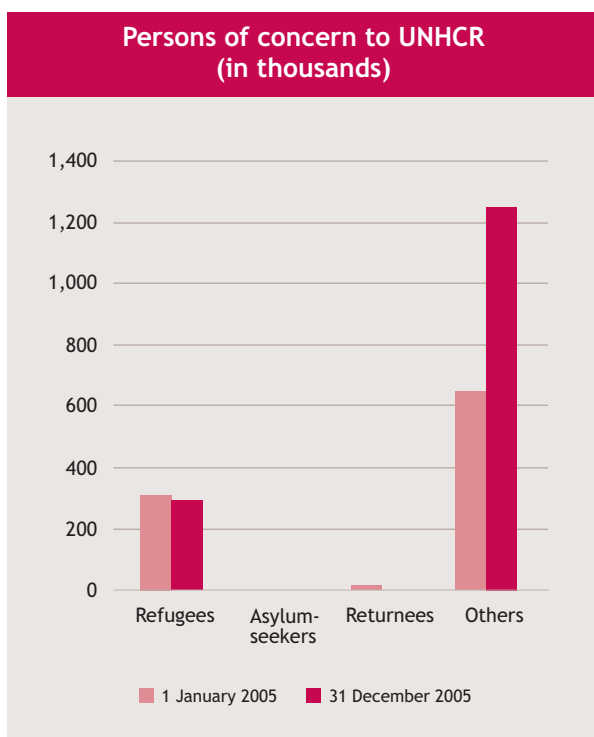


coordinate protection and assistance for the people affected by the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster. With 55,000 transitional shelters constructed by almost 100 implementing agencies, coordination was challenging and complex. UNHCR constructed over 4,400 shelters in Ampara and Jaffna, two of the worst hit, most inaccessible, and most conflict-ridden districts.

Challenges and concerns

The protracted situation of the refugees in the camps in Bangladesh and Nepal, and the lack of prospects for an early solution to their plight, remains a major concern to UNHCR. While 230,000 Myanmar Muslims have returned from Bangladesh over the years, those remaining (approximately 20,000) are in a highly problematic and protracted predicament. Protection and health conditions in the camps were nearing emergency levels, but efforts to improve living conditions were impeded by limitations imposed by the Government on NGO partners and challenging working conditions. In the camps, tensions ran high during the year following an incident in November 2004 that left three refugees dead, including a 12-year-old boy, and scores of others injured and under arrest. After the incident, some refugees left the camps and settled elsewhere in the country without any assistance. In addition, UNHCR continued to receive reports of alleged attempts by refugee representatives to force refugees to return.

Throughout 2005, the search for durable solutions for the refugee populations in the camps and urban settings remained an important objective for UNHCR. As a regional priority, UNHCR continued to expand its prevention and response capacities to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), with the introduction of standard operating procedures in all operations in the region.





Sri Lanka: An IDP settlement in the old section of Guyatree Mandanai Temple, Tirukkouil district. *UNHCR / H.J. Davies*

The launching of the age, gender and diversity mainstreaming initiative enabled field operations to revise assistance and protection strategies to effectively respond to refugees' individual needs.

Progress towards solutions

During the year 2005, some 27,200 IDPs returned to their place of origin in Sri Lanka, in addition to 1,200 refugees who repatriated from India with UNHCR's assistance. This brings to over 407,100 the total number of IDPs who have returned to their homes since the 2002 ceasefire.

Although no significant progress was made regarding the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal, UNHCR encouraged a recent initiative by a number of governments to actively engage in finding comprehensive solutions for these refugees, including the possibility of resettlement. Thus, there is renewed hope that concerted and coordinated efforts by these countries will revive the negotiations between the Governments of Nepal and Bhutan. The meeting between the respective Foreign Ministers of the two countries in November 2005 on the sidelines of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) meeting in Dhaka has given hope of a new momentum to the bilateral process.

Sustained efforts by UNHCR have resulted in better defined access to naturalization as a durable solution for Hindu and Sikh Afghan refugees in India. Greater flexibility in government procedures led to the granting of Indian citizenship to four mandate refugees at the end of the year. The situation of the residual ethnic Afghan refugees remained problematic, highlighting the need for access to resettlement opportunities. Intensified lobbying by UNHCR resulted in increased resettlement submissions in 2005 for these refugees.

Operations

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

A re-registration of the camp population was undertaken in **Bangladesh** and completed in early 2006. The exercise identified a range of protection problems that needed to be urgently addressed such as new arrivals, unregistered children, arbitrary arrest and extended detention without charge of refugees, and falsified documentation. UNHCR is revising its operation in Bangladesh, as part of a wider regional strategic review of all refugee situations emanating from Myanmar.

In early 2005, UNHCR's community services partner withdrew from the refugee programme, reducing

UNHCR's intervention capacity. The Government of Bangladesh remained the sole implementing and operational partner in the refugee programme. The protection environment in the camp became untenable, with an increasing number of cases of sexual and gender-based violence. UNHCR was unable to effect changes in camp dynamics in a way that would enable it to provide basic assistance to refugees. In late 2005, a UNHCR-commissioned survey of mortality and nutrition in the two camps revealed an alarming rate of malnutrition among children under five years. UNHCR and WFP are undertaking a comprehensive assessment of all existing arrangements with a view to implementing the recommendations of the survey.

UNHCR continued to undertake mandate refugee status determination in **India**. This was principally for asylum-seekers from Afghanistan and Myanmar. In New Delhi there were almost 11,400 urban refugees at the end of the year, mainly Afghans (9,700), of whom the majority were Hindu and Sikh. Refugees from Myanmar numbered 1,500 and there were some 200 refugees of other nationalities. No *refoulement* of mandate refugees was reported in 2005.

Improved refugee status determination (RSD) contributed to greater harmonization of decisions across the region. Fast-track processes were made available for vulnerable cases, including consideration of gender and age issues. A special approach was adopted in mid-2005 to address and reduce the backlog of pending cases. With rapidly increasing numbers of Somali asylum-seekers putting an additional strain on RSD capacity at the end of the year, measures were introduced, including streamlining the RSD to process vulnerable cases and to ensure that other refugee groups have alternative protection means. After a survey of the situation of refugees from Myanmar in New Delhi was completed, several complementary mechanisms were introduced to reinforce protection. These included the outreach programme through "Community Protection Days", a women's protection clinic, the systematic protection

profiling of women to identify risk factors, and the introduction of a "protection panel" which facilitated a multi-functional and proactive in-house approach to protection problems. The initial results from these initiatives have shown vast improvements in communication, identification of needs, and protection delivery, and a collaborative approach now routinely informs UNHCR's follow-up work with refugees. In 2005, 60 Afghans repatriated from India with UNHCR's assistance and another 30 returned spontaneously. In addition, 300 refugees were resettled in a third country.

In 2006, procedures on prevention of and response to SGBV were in the process of being implemented throughout the region. These procedures define roles and responsibilities for each individual, group and agency. The streamlining of procedures at the reception stage in RSD operations ensured that SGBV cases were detected early, and that necessary assistance was available. It appears that domestic violence continues to be the most common form of SGBV in the subregion.

In late 2005, the age, gender and diversity mainstreaming strategy was implemented in most Asian countries. Participatory assessments were undertaken with refugees by multi-functional teams in almost every country. The results have further highlighted the protection problems peculiar to refugee men, women, boys and girls respectively in protracted situations. Training was provided to UNHCR staff in most countries in the region. All countries are expected to integrate the findings from the participatory assessments in their annual Country Operations Plans as part of the implementation of the strategy.

Funding

The programmes in the sub-region were funded with earmarked contributions amounting to some 70 per cent of the total budget, and with allocations from more broadly earmarked contributions.

Budget and expenditure (USD)						
Country	Final budget			Expenditure		
	Annual programme budget	Supplementary programme budget ¹	Total	Annual programme budget	Supplementary programme budget ¹	Total
Bangladesh	3,428,165	0	3,428,165	2,877,823	0	2,877,823
India	3,686,463	0	3,686,463	3,331,512	0	3,331,512
Nepal	8,057,744	0	8,057,744	7,414,931	0	7,414,931
Sri Lanka	8,970,046	14,352,430	23,322,476	8,512,788	9,256,933	17,769,721
Total	24,142,418	14,352,430	38,494,848	22,137,054	9,256,933	31,393,987

¹ The Supplementary programme figures apply to the Supplementary Programme for the Indian Ocean earthquake - Tsunami emergency.

Note: The Supplementary programme budget does not include a seven per cent support cost that is recovered from contributions to meet indirect costs for UNHCR.

Restricted voluntary contributions (USD)

Earmarking ¹	Donor	Annual programme budget	Supplementary programme budget
South Asia			
	Canada	661,157	0
	Japan	1,500,000	0
Sub-total		2,161,157	0
Bangladesh			
	European Commission	1,356,852	0
	Japan	500,000	0
	United States	828,000	0
Sub-total		2,684,852	0
India			
	Japan	500,000	0
	United States	915,934	0
Sub-total		1,415,934	0
Nepal			
	European Commission	1,176,471	0
	Germany	304,878	0
	Japan	1,000,000	0
	<i>Shinnyo-en</i>	57,143	0
	Sweden	756,430	0
	United States	1,762,180	0
Sub-total		5,057,101	0
Sri Lanka			
	Austcare	0	39,185
	Australia	0	774,593
	Australia for UNHCR	0	4,813
	Canada	0	213,115
	Denmark	529,197	1,824,818
	<i>Deutsche Stiftung für UNO-Flüchtlingshilfe</i>	0	284,939
	European Commission	1,499,395	3,668,630
	Germany	0	1,633,987
	International Islamic Charitable Organization	0	41,980
	Japan	1,600,000	2,000,000
	Miscellaneous donors / Private donors in Italy	955,547	178,980
	Netherlands	0	1,854,000
	<i>Stichting Vluchteling</i>	0	2,252,829
	Sweden	620,347	0
	United Kingdom	0	52,539
	United States	2,082,420	0
	USA for UNHCR	0	87,847
Sub-total		7,286,907	14,912,255
Total		18,605,951	14,912,255

¹ For more information on the earmarking, please refer to the donor profiles.