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## Entrapped civilians will receive all attention - Minister

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Rohan Mathes Disaster Management Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe said yesterday that the innocent civilians entrapped and confined within an area of 35 square kilometres, would be looked after well.

Minister Samarasinghe, addressing a press conference at the Presidential Secretariat in Colombo, said life in the North was getting back to normalcy, step by step. Prices of food and other essential items were decreasing gradually, with the opening of the A-9 road for transportation of food items and the commercial sector was slowly but steadily settling down, he said. "Opening of the A-9 highway is bringing-in dividends. This was of great significance in the context of better prospects for the livelihoods of the civilians," he added. Nevertheless, he said the arduous task of transporting food by sea, was being carried out as planned, despite all odds and obstacles, due to the artillery fire of the LTTE and the inclement weather conditions among others. From February 17, around 750 MT of food and essential medical items have been transported by sea. "No other organization, NGO or INGO, assisted us in this great humanitarian effort. Not even the International Red Cross (ICRC), who was reluctant to fly the ICRC flag, sans the permission of the LTTE. Therefore we bore the brunt of this exercise fully, in pursuing the commercial sector to build-up confidence in this meritorious venture," he said. He said the Government was in no way prepared to abandon or isolate the innocent Vanni civilians. "We should and we would instil hope to the Vanni population," Minister Samarasinghe claimed, to the extent of giving them an opportunity to elect their own representatives, like in the East. The Minister said around 39,324 Vanni civilians had already crossed over to Government territory. A total of 3,195 had been evacuated. There were around 2,224 patients in seven Government hospitals. Minister Samarasinghe said the A-9 road would not be opened for civilians, until such time the road was fully cleared of mines which the LTTE had laid in the past. "It may take some time," he said. Foreign Ministry Secretary Dr. Palitha Kohona was of the view that foreign mediation or a facilitating role was absolutely unnecessary and irrelevant, given the possibility of a crushing defeat of the LTTE. Military Spokesman Udaya Nanayakkara also spoke. Courtesy: dailynews.lk