
Resettlement deep in tiger terrain too

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The former strongholds of the LTTE -- Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi Districts -- are among the areas in which the internally displaced Tamils of Northern Sri Lanka will be resettled under the government's current IDP resettlement programme. The resettlement of a total 41,685 persons from 12,095 families will take place in the current phase of resettlement which began yesterday, Oct. 22.

Kilinochchi was the administrative center LTTE in what it claimed to be the separate state of Eelam. Mullaitivu was the military stronghold of the LTTE for many years, from which it directed most operations against the Security Forces. This was also the Head Quarters of its leader Velupillai Prabhakaran. The government had earlier resettled more than 15,900 of the IDPs which included the elderly and pregnant women who have been re-united with their families, according to their wish, and also the elderly who have no family sent to institutional care. All children who have no family care are resettled under foster care through courts of Sri Lanka. The completion of the current resettlement would leave 210,138 IDPs in relief centers whose resettlement is also planned for early implementation. The current phase of resettlement will see displaced persons going to the Districts of Vavuniya, Mannar, Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi. Of these Oddusudan, Manthai East and Thunukkai in Mullaitivu District, and Karachchi and Poonakary in the Kilinochchi District were heavily damaged during the days controlled by the LTTE, and as they forcibly moved the people as human shields with the advance of Sri Lanka troops, in the latter stages of the battle to liberate the North from terrorism. The families that are being resettled are given assistance through the following packages of aid depending on needs. Non-food items Set of kitchen utensils Agricultural tool kits Six months dry rations Initial payment of Rs.5,000 Shelter grant of Rs.25,000 Roofing sheets Land preparation cost of Rs.4,000 per acre Provision of seed paddy, fertilizer Provision of transport facilities

Contributions have come from United States High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), World Food Programme (WFP) and the Government of India. All other assistance is from the Government of Sri Lanka.

The next stage of resettlement will commence no sooner the required areas are completely cleared of landmines and after representatives of the IDPs to be resettled, visit such locations and agree to re-locate to such places. It is emphasized that all re-locations are carried out on the voluntary agreement of the persons to be re-located. President Mahinda Rajapaksa in a message to the families being resettled states; "That period of immense tragedy is now over, as are the temporary hardships you faced as internally displaced persons. You are moving on to a new life, in the company of family and friends. You will find new and welcome challenges of the future. My Government has done much to make your new life most acceptable to you, providing the needs for a quality of life to enhance your dignity as a person.

The most cherished asset you have today are your children, who you have sheltered as best as you could. This is the time to ensure that your children are guided by you to benefit from the new facilities that are being provided for them and ensure that they are never again allowed to be misled by false prophets or saviours. Together you can build a new life and look to benefit from the many opportunities that will be available in the tranquility of peace and friendship".

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