

SRI LANKA REPORT

March 2008

The crisis in the north and east of the nation is still very evident with an increasing number of military checkpoints in place and the presence of large numbers of soldiers and equipment. The government forces say they are gaining the ascendancy, with most of the fighting taking place in the north and northwest.

The journey from Colombo to the Eastern Province takes 8 – 9 hours by road although the distance is barely 300 kms. During the two and a half weeks in the country I travelled to Valaichenai and Vavuniya (Childrens Homes) Trincomalee, and Rakwana (local churches).

CHILDRENS HOMES - VALAICHENAI

Girls Home 23 girls and 5 staff

I was very impressed with the general atmosphere – just like a big family with the older girls helping the staff attend to the needs of the smaller ones. Four of the older girls are waiting for the results of their last exam and are not attending school for a few weeks. They have been enrolled in sewing classes and are really enjoying it. The property looks great - lots of plants and flowers add something special to this very dry and sandy location. The vegetable gardens and fruit trees are doing well also. There are 100 young coconut plants ready to be transplanted or sold.

Last year the girls learned how to make gift cards for birthdays, Christmas etc. Their stock was taken to Colombo and the \$75 raised was given to missions to help another children's home in Myanmar. They were so excited to be able to help someone else through their efforts.

Boys Home 18 boys and 4 staff

This property also looks great – the water tower has been completed except for painting, and gardens established and looking healthy. The boys are very settled and look forward to playing cricket for exercise each day. (The girls also have pitch at their Home and are attempting to grow some grass on it to show up the boys!)

They carry out their duties each day and keeping the Home very clean. Some of the boys have been with us now for 8 years and it is so pleasing to see how they have developed. I got plenty of “commentary” about the cricket – especially when India fell over the line

Kalkudah Property

Some months ago, just over 3 acres of land was sown in rice and the first harvest produced 2,450 kilos – an excellent start considering the lower than expected rainfall during the period. The rice is good quality and will supplement the food for the children. We expect the next harvest to be much better.

BOYS HOME – VAVUNIYA

7 boys 4 staff

The children all seem very settled and look very healthy. One of the boys has a severe eye problem and will need glasses. He will be taken for tests. There are some problems with the drinking water – the area is renowned for high calcium content, and we are seeing what can be done to rectify this. Fruit and vegetable gardens are being established and look great. We will be investing in some chairs, white board, some extra shelving for the kitchen and some sports equipment and another bicycle. There is an obvious need for a fridge also.

The kids travel 3 kms to and from school each day on the small motorbike with Ps Murali. Ultimately we will have to purchase a 3 wheeler and/or van as the numbers of children increase. There are now some new regulations which we must meet prior to children being granted permission to stay at the Home – this is a frustratingly slow process as there are many children in need.

Because of the military restrictions in place, no vehicles are allowed past the last major checkpoint about an hour south of the town. This requires walking quite a distance through a large checking area, presenting passports and identity cards for locals, and then cramming onto buses for the ride into town. There are two other checkpoints on the way – all passengers have to leave the bus and proceed through the area on foot and have thorough searches made of any luggage or belongings. This is quite time consuming and a little alarming for any newcomer. The same system applies on the way out. On the day before I arrived a motorbike bomb was detonated at a police checkpoint only a few minutes from the Boys Home, resulting in the deaths of two policeman and a soldier and 7 others injured.

TRINCOMALEE

The CRC church on Sunday morning was packed out – about 300 people. The church is quite conservative, the worship is excellent, and it is a praying church. There are six branch churches which are all doing quite well also and I was able to meet a number of the pastors, and most of the graduates of the CRC Bible School who are serving in various ways amongst their local churches. The church is being extended to seat 1500 and will consist of three levels.

Trincomalee is the main base for the army and navy in the Eastern Province and there is a heavy military presence there, with checkpoints on all of the main roads and scattered throughout the town.

RAKWANA

Located in the rich tea growing area about 4 hours south east of Colombo, this small church (40 people) is also very healthy. There are a number of house churches functioning through the plantations. Quite a large excavation has been done in readiness

for a proposed building – presently the church meets in the pastor’s house, but this is now too small.

CRC MINISTRY TRAINING CENTRE – VALAICHENAI

The School will recommence on June 9th, 2008. It is later than normal due to the difficulties students have in moving from their homes to the school caused by the travel restrictions and the security problems.

Kevin Hughes
International Co-ordinator