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Title: The Minister of External Affairs and Minister of Finance made a statement regarding situation In Sri Lanka.

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to apprise the august House about the present situation in Sri Lanka. ...(*Interruptions*)

Since I last addressed the House on this issue in October 2008, developments have unfolded rapidly in the northern Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan Government forces have made significant advances into LTTE-held territory, restricting LTTE cadres to a small area of approximately 150 sq. km. adjacent to the coast. The Sri Lankan forces have captured Kilinochchi, Elephant Pass and Mullaitivu town and have regained control of the A-9 highway.

A serious source of concern to us has been the condition of the civilians and internally displaced persons (IDPs), mostly Tamil, caught up in the zone of conflict. Estimates on the number of civilians trapped vary, but 70,000 or so are estimated to be there now. The LTTE were reportedly using them as human shields.[\[r2\]](#)

Hon. Members may rest assured that our strong concerns for the safety, security and welfare of the civilians caught in the conflict have led us to stay actively engaged to prevent a further deterioration of humanitarian conditions. We have sent relief supplies to the civilians and the internally displaced persons (IDPs), facilitated access by international and UN organisations, and suggested ways for civilians and IDPs to escape from the conflict zone. Two batches of relief assistance have been sent so far including 80,000 family packs of food and non-food articles, collected and donated by the Government of Tamil Nadu, and medicines. Another batch of relief material is being sent.

I personally visited Colombo on 27th January. In my discussions with Sri Lankan President His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa, I stressed the need to give an opportunity to civilians and IDPs caught up in the conflict to emerge from the LTTE held areas, and suggested a pause in hostilities to provide the necessary environment. On 29th January 2009, the Sri Lankan President announced a 48-hour period for civilian safe passage to secure areas. He also appealed to the LTTE to allow civilians to leave and assured the safety and security of the civilians who did so.

In the last two weeks, nearly 35,000 civilians have come out of LTTE-held areas. Sadly some of those escaping from the conflict have been caught in cross-fire and, in recent incidents have been stopped and even killed by LTTE cadres. ...(*Interruptions*)

MR. SPEAKER: This is not the way to react.

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: As the conflict enters what may be the final phase of military operations, the LTTE would best serve the interest of the Tamils by immediately releasing all civilians and laying down arms.

The Government of India is ready to facilitate the evacuation of civilians trapped in the area of conflict, working with the Government of Sri Lanka and the ICRC who would take responsibility for the security, screening and rehabilitation of these internally displaced persons.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, India continues to support a negotiated political settlement in Sri Lanka within the framework of an undivided Sri Lanka acceptable to all the communities, including the Tamil community. The LTTE remains a proscribed organisation in India and has done much damage to the Tamil community.

In this context, the earlier normal democratic political processes begin in Sri Lanka the better. In our view, after 23 years of conflict, there is today a political opportunity to restore life to normalcy in the Northern Province and throughout Sri Lanka. The President of Sri Lanka assured me that this is also his intent. The full implementation of the 13th Amendment to the Sri Lankan Constitution would be a significant first step. Hon. Members would recall that the 13th Amendment was introduced to give effect to the India-Sri Lanka accord in 1987. Going beyond the 13th Amendment on the question of devolution of powers would be significant.

India is ready to work with the Government of Sri Lanka in their important tasks of rehabilitation and reconstruction which lie ahead in Sri Lanka, particularly the north and east. We have begun steps to implement developmental projects in the Eastern Province such as a 500 MW thermal power project, assistance for a rail bus project and the setting up of IT centres.

I wish to assure the hon. Members that Government will continue to stay engaged in the process of bringing enduring peace to Sri Lanka, working with the Government of Sri Lanka and the various communities in Sri Lanka in pursuit of our common security and prosperity.

(Placed in Library, See No. LT 10584/09)

...(Interruptions)

SHRI A. KRISHNASWAMY (SRIPERUMBUDUR): We want a permanent ceasefire.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Please give a notice for discussion.

**12.09 hrs.**

MR. SPEAKER: Item No. 28, Shri Pranab Mukherjee.

...(Interruptions)