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## Must address issues that stand in the way of unity - PM

(FT.LK) - Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe on Monday focused on the need to link the Northern Province with southern development corridors to develop its economy focusing on agriculture, fishing, tourism and manufacturing.

Wickremesinghe speaking in Kilinochchi during a visit to the war-affected Province noted that despite the war ending nine years ago, the region had not seen an economic regeneration. He pointed out that despite the development of infrastructure significant challenges, especially on poverty, water and housing access remained in the area and required Government assistance. He acknowledged the region would need a multipronged approach including better education and employment opportunities to improve its GDP contribution and provide better living standards for its residents.

"Out of the nine provinces in Sri Lanka, we must remember that the poorest is the North. Other than Jaffna, this situation encompasses Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu. Vavuniya has seen some development since the end of the war, but Jaffna still has several challenges that need to be addressed. One key point is the return of military-held land to civilians. Another is the need to address chronic water shortages in what is primarily an agriculture area," he said. He insisted that progress could be seen in the return of Tamil people to their homes and these efforts were being supported by the Government. However, he conceded that more needs to be done, especially in

providing better water access to the region. Wickremesinghe pointed out that the Northern Province should be connected to larger development efforts in Hambantota, Polonnaruwa, Rajarata and Trincomalee that are to be connected to economic corridors as per Government policy.

"Sri Lanka's development should be planned from Jaffna to Hambantota. In that effort, we should first focus on the Kilinochchi area, which would require water supply projects including rainwater harvesting. In olden times much of this region was covered in paddy and grains. We need to bring that era back. In addition we need to develop fishing in this area. Tourism could be developed in Trincomalee, Jaffna, Mannar and Vavuniya. We will pay attention to establishing a manufacturing centre in Paranthan. We will look at how this area can be developed through these efforts." The Prime Minister stressed that the North



Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe gestures during his speech at the Kilinochchi District Secretary's Office. Northern Province Governor Reginald Cooray and Prison Reforms, Rehabilitation, Resettlement and Hindu Religious Affairs Minister D.M. Swaminathan are also present

and South has to come together to develop Sri Lanka, and that it was imperative to address issues that stand in the way of unity. He noted that the Office of Missing Persons would be holding sessions in Kilinochchi, and assured the Government was dedicated to providing for the people beyond simply building infrastructure. "I expect to return to this region to observe development activities. Kilinochchi must improve its contribution to the national GDP. I

will hold discussions with the Board of Investment after land in Paranthan has been acquired. The Government must move beyond putting down concrete and develop the economy in a way that benefits the people. Every effort made by us should be to raise the living standards of the people."

## Rains subside for most part 24 Dead, 174,310 affected

By Shaahidah Riza and Ranmini Gunasekara

(ceylontoday.lk) - People in flood risk areas have been evacuated to safe locations. At present, approximately 17,976 families have been evacuated to 265 welfare centres due to flood and landslide risks in nine Districts, the DMC said. The National Disaster Relief Service Centre (NDRSC) has provided Rs 44.15 million cash allocations to the 12 District Secretaries to address the immediate needs of the affected populations. The sluice gates of Deduru-oya, Kukuleganga and Rajanganaya tanks

were still open and in a few areas of Ja-Ela, inundation continued to prevail. Sand bags have been stacked by the Army and Navy together with the communities to stop flood water penetration to settlements. The Gampaha-Ganemulla road is still submerged and transportation is limited in the Kirindiwita, Akarawita areas. Low-lying areas are still under water in Wattala in the Gampaha District. A Hindu Kovil has been heavily damaged due to fallen tree in the Norwood estate in Nuwara Eliya. The DMC is presently coordinating with Military agencies through its Emergency

Operation Centre for better response interventions and the NDRSC is undertaking needs assessment at local levels, especially in safety centres.

The DMC added that 121 houses were fully damaged and 5,205 were partially damaged.

The NDRSC has allocated Rs 44.15 Million from National Insurance Trust Fund and Treasury funds to the most affected Districts in order to assist the severely affected populations. Agencies that are providing humanitarian assistance were directed to the North-Western areas and also some agencies are supporting communities in affected areas of Kalutara, Ratnapura, Gampaha and Puttalam.

Speaking to Ceylon Today, Deputy Director of the DMC Pradeep Kodippili noted that about 5,000 people have returned to their homes. Military Spokesperson Brigadier Sumith Atapattu added that the Army along with the Navy is involved in rehabilitation works after the floods and landslides, to facilitate the victims' return to their homes.

"We have just commenced the rehabilitation work in the aftermath of the disasters. The troops that were already deployed on ground are presently helping the people upon the request of the DMC and the Grama Niladharis of the respective areas," he said.

Commenting on the aftermath of the

disasters, Acting Director General of Health Services Dr. Sarath Amunugama said yesterday (28) that there have been no increases in diseases such as typhoid, diarrhoea, and dysentery in the disaster-affected areas.

"In times like these, we monitor these diseases and generate a report every day. So far, there have not been any reported increases in bowel diseases such as typhoid, diarrhoea, dysentery or food poisoning in the 50 or so camps that house the flood-affected people."

He also noted that there were no reports of any epidemics spreading due to the flood situation either.

Meanwhile, Police security has been intensified in areas where people have abandoned their properties to escape the floods and landslides in order to prevent looting, the Police said and instructed the public to report any such incident as soon as it takes place.

Police went on to note that the Special Task Force is also on standby if the incidents of looting intensify and that strict action will be taken against those who are involved in looting.

Incidents of demanding extortion were also reported in the affected areas where those who assist victims of flood, demand monies for their services. The Police advised the public to report such incidents immediately.



Flood situation due to torrential rains. (Photo: Twitter/AnumehaThomas)

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