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First post-war national census hits a snag

BY SHAMINDRA FERDIANDO

Sri Lanka's first post-war census is in jeopardy due to a technical glitch forcing the Census and Statistics Department to explore ways and means to overcome the difficulties.

Authoritative sources told *The Island* that the much talked about 2011 countrywide census was unlikely to be completed before end of this year due to failure on the part of the private firm involved in the operation.

Director General of Census and Statistics Department, Mrs. D. B. P. Suranjana Vidyaratne wasn't available for comment.

H. R. Gunasekera, also of the Census and Statistics Department, told *The Island* that they were confident of finalizing the census soon in

spite of recent difficulties. The official said that the first two stages of the census had been conducted successfully and third was to be carried out last month. Asked whether, the Department could carry out the final stage before end of this year, he said that they would be able to fix the dates for the third stage during December. He acknowledged the possibility of the third stage being dragged on in to early next year.

Other sources alleged that the firm chosen by a Cabinet appointed committee hadn't been proficient to handle the job. Responding to a query, sources said that the equipment especially brought down for the job had failed.

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The third stage is expected to take at least three weeks to complete in spite of some 80,000 being involved in the operation.

The last complete census was conducted in 1981 before the eruption of major terrorist attacks. The census scheduled for 1991 couldn't be conducted due to large parts of the Northern and Eastern Provinces being under LTTE control. The 2001 census was carried out in 18 out of the 25 districts.

At the launch of the census, DG Census and Statistics Department said that the process would cost about Rs. 1.4 bn.

The census would give valuable information on demographic and other related characteristics, useful to planners, policy makers, administrators, researchers, and other data users.