



# HMS CHATHAM



## NEWS RELEASE 01/05

### HMS CHATHAM PROVIDES HUMANITARIAN SUPPORT

HMS CHATHAM, arrived off the coast of Colombo, Sri Lanka on 3<sup>rd</sup> Jan 05 as part of the UK military support to the Department for International Development (DfID) humanitarian relief efforts. The Operational Liaison and Reconnaissance Team (OLRT) from the Permanent Joint Headquarters in the UK, the British High Commissioner and Defence Attache were flown out to ship for initial briefings which continued the following morning at the High Commission in Colombo. From this it was decided that CHATHAM and her two Lynx helicopters would initially be employed conducting reconnaissance along the south coast to assess the level of damage and assess where further assistance could be given. The first reconnaissance flights took place that afternoon and helped narrow the areas to be further investigated. The ship proceeded south overnight on the 4<sup>th</sup> Jan and early on the morning of the 5<sup>th</sup> landed small teams to carry out a comprehensive shore recce. The intentions are to offer support and assistance to the fishing communities on the coast of Sri Lanka who have literally had their livelihoods washed away. The skills and capabilities of HMS CHATHAM, and RFA DILIGENCE in a few days, will be concentrated on offering assistance in surveying, boat repair, technical support and general labouring to help replace the infrastructure that has been destroyed.

So far most of the damage found has been either repairable by the local population or involving large, civil engineering works. Some medical stores have been supplied and the needs of the communities have been fed back to the British High Commission and the Centre for National Operations (CNO), the central co-ordinating authority of the Sri Lankan government. CHATHAM is not carrying aid, but rather expertise to conduct some repairs, and the ability to provide objective reconnaissance either by air, or by landing sailors by boats into areas proving difficult to reach by land.

Captain Steve Chick, the Commanding Officer said; “We have been in theatre for only a couple of days but already we have been able to provide information back to the wider humanitarian relief effort. By putting small teams ashore we have been able to talk to the local community and other aid agencies in the area to assess the needs and inform the decisions being made centrally. The Ship’s Company is extremely pleased to be helping in this support effort and whilst we are not delivering aid we are offering whatever support we can. We are maintaining a flexible approach and responding where we are directed and where our longer range helicopter reconnaissance suggests further investigations are justified.”

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