

INITIAL POST TSUNAMI RECOVERY PHASE RESULTS AND CHALLENGES

*Mr. Tilak Ranaviraja
Chairman, Task Force for Relief (TAFOR)*

Impact

The disaster was totally unexpected, and the magnitude unimaginable. Though Sri Lanka faces natural calamities such as floods, droughts and earth slips, the extent and the magnitude of such problems have been miniscule compared to this disaster.

Currently the Police figures indicate a dead and missing figure of over 38,900. The No. of Families affected is around 234,000 which is nearly one million persons. 114,000 houses and private buildings completely destroyed or partially damaged. 176 schools fully or partially destroyed.

435 km of roads and 23 bridges damaged. 160 km of railway track, 35 main and 34 sub railway stations and 10 bridges destroyed. 600 km of low voltage lines, 50 km of medium voltage lines and 6500 km of power service lines were destroyed. 222,660 households lost access to electricity

Institutional Response

Immediately following the disaster, the Ministry of Public Security, law and order set up an operations centre to handle relief and rescue efforts.

The Secretary, Ministry of Public Security, Law and Order was appointed the Commissioner General of Essential Services, to enable the coordination of the government agencies involved in relief and rescue.

As the sheer magnitude of the disaster emerged, three special Task Forces were appointed by H.E the President to deal with the situation. These were, the Task Force for Rescue and Relief (TAFRER), Task Force for Logistics, Law and Order (TAFLOL), and Task Force for Rebuilding the Nation (TAFREN). The Centre of National Operations (CNO) was established under the Presidential Secretariat to coordinate immediate relief operations and to gather and distribute data relating to relief.

After approximately one month, when the immediate relief operations were concluded, TAFRER and TAFLOL was amalgamated to a single task force - Task Force for Relief (TAFOR) to oversee, coordinate and implement all relief measures.

To this new Task Force, was handed over the responsibility of providing interim accommodation to those affected, food distribution, operating of the scaled down Centre for National Operations and ensuring proper distribution of government relief packages.

Immediate Rescue and relief Operation

The Police, Army, Airforce and the Medical Services were involved in the immediate rescue and recovery work. Transportation of those injured to hospitals, clearing of roads and search for survivors commenced immediately. Clergy, government officials and volunteers were also involved in this effort. Medical staff and supplies were airlifted as required, to the affected areas.

51 Welfare Centers were opened up on the day of the disaster, increasing to 653 by 1st January. Provision of safe drinking water and food and sanitation facilities was given priority. Around the end of the first week, priority was given to the identification of unclaimed bodies and proper disposal of dead bodies.

Foreign Governments, UN and other international agencies, national and international NGOs began relief operations within the first week. Operations were streamlined at the Airport for clearance of Relief Supplies. Over 350 flights from around the world arrived with relief. food, water, medicines, clothes and tents were the main items received. 15,000 tonnes of relief items and equipment and 2000 tonnes of medicine were airlifted through these flights

The Ministry of Social Welfare and the Ministry of Relief Reconstruction and Reconciliation commenced the distribution of food and other essential items to districts. A large amount of relief supplies were also distributed by private individuals and organizations during the First Phase of the relief operation.

The operations at the Airport was streamlined to enable clearance and distribution of relief items with minimal delay, without compromising security. Special Tax concessions for relief items were announced. The overall coordination of the airport operation was handled by the Commissioner General of Essential Services and the Chairman of the Task Force for Logistics, Law and Order.

The Airport and Aviation Authority, the ministries of Social Service and Health, the Airforce, Police, Telecom Regulatory Commission, the Registrar of Motor Vehicles, and the Departments of Customs and Immigration were the agencies involved in this operation. In addition to food, water, clothes and medicines, this operation handled speedy clearance of vehicles, communication equipment.

Military personnel from India, USA, Canada, Belgium, Austria, Bangladesh and Pakistan arrived quickly for relief work and many other countries followed. They assisted in clearing of roads, setting up temporary bridges, demolition of damaged buildings and providing medical services.

The Centre of National Operations (CNO) was set up at the Presidential Secretariat. During the first month it coordinated work of the various foreign and local organizations involved in relief and facilitating their work. Data relating to the disaster and relief work was gathered and distributed. Donors and relief agencies were able to get access directly to the relevant government agencies through this mechanism.

Restoration of Infrastructure

Within the first two weeks, most of the damaged roads and bridges were rehabilitated, allowing road access to all affected areas. Telecommunications too were restored within a short period of time. In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, cellular and wireless telecom operations were able to provide some level of service, which greatly assisted the relief efforts.

Electricity was restored to almost all areas within the first week. The coastal railway line became fully operational within 10 weeks.

Though over 150 schools were fully or partially damaged, and many schools were initially used as welfare centres, the schools are fully operational now.

Services of affected public institutions such as District Secretaries and Divisional Secretaries, Police Stations and Hospitals commenced immediately following the disaster. Personnel from unaffected areas were mobilized to support those already working in the affected areas. The necessary equipment such as fax machines and telephones that were damaged, were replaced. Field hospitals and medical camps were set-up in areas where hospitals were damaged, especially in the North-Eastern provinces.

All relief operations of the North-Eastern Provinces were carried out in close collaboration with District and Divisional Secretaries.

21, 970 Mt. tonnes of food were distributed to the North-Eastern provinces and 10,749 Mt. tonnes to the Southern and Western provinces by the 30th of March.

Camps and Internally Displaced Persons

Welfare Camps were set up in government structures such as schools and in religious institutions. Many of the displaced also found accommodation with friends and relatives.

The Camp management was mainly handled under the overall supervision of the Divisional Secretaries and the District Secretaries. Personnel from the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Social Services and the armed forces were involved in managing the camps, in addition to the staff of Divisional Secretaries. In several districts, selected camps were managed by private sectors organizations

The number of welfare centres reduced to 216 from 733. Total no. of IDPP reduced from approximately 550,000 to 74,000. 60,000 of them are in three districts – Ampara, Batticaloa and Trincomalee.

Distribution of Relief

Immediately after the emergency rescue and relief measures, the government introduced four measures of relief to normalize the lives of affected persons.

A sum of Rs. 15,000 per person at a total cost of Rs. 450 million, has been provided as funeral expenses for families of each deceased person. A sum of Rs. 2,500 per affected family was given for purchase of kitchen utensils at a cost of Rs. 580 million.

A Cash grant of Rs. 200 and a basket of food worth Rs. 175 per week per individual affected are being provided for six months. The food basket consists of 2.8 kg of rice, 420 g of dhal, 140g of sugar, 140 g of cooking oil and 140 g of wheat and soya mixture. This is supplied by the World Food Programme. The cash grant is by the government. The total cost of this package is Rs. 8550 million. There are approximately 950,000 beneficiaries of this measure.

Rs. 5,000 as resettlement allowance has been given per family at a cost of Rs. 1,160 million per month.

In addition, special loans for affected government servants, housing loans for those affected and concessionary loans for businesses affected have been announced. Concessions on electricity and water bills have been given to those affected.

The distribution of relief is being carried out through District Secretaries / Divisional Secretaries and Grama Niladharies.

Evaluation of relief distribution is carried out by the office of the Commissioner-General of Essential Services on a daily basis. Senior Government officials visited all the affected districts to ensure speedy and equitable distribution of relief.

Food distribution is handled by the Ministry of RRR with the World Food Programmes. Individuals and families obtain their food rations through the local Multipurpose Cooperative Societies. The Samurdhi Ministry is also involved in assisting the distribution.

Law and Order situation

The general law and order situation was handled commendably by the Police and the police STF. They were assisted by the military in camp management. No major incidents were reported during the immediate aftermath or thereafter.

Interim Housing

On the instructions of H.E. the President, the Transitional Accommodation Project was set-up under the Commissioner General of Essential Services and TAFOR. This is the apex agency that will monitor and coordinate the project. This is a collective government, non-government and UN agency collaboration. Policy Development by the Government in consultation with NGOs & INGOs. Facilitation & provision of land by the Government. Funding by NGOs, INGO. Project Management & Delivery by the NGOs/INGOs

The target for providing accommodation was 10,000 units by 10th April and a further 20,000 by the end of May.

Such accommodation will address the needs between the emergency phase and the reconstruction phase. It is meant for those who are in uncomfortable tents, in schools and religious institutions and other public buildings and those who are living with relatives and friends in crowded living conditions. Minimum Specification: about 200 Sq.ft. Cost range stipulated by Donors to ensure equity (presently \$ US 300 to 400)

UN agencies, IOM, various donors and INGOs/NGOs have established a coordination body on transitional shelter. Working groups have met with line Ministries and formulated a process. Transitional Shelter Strategy and Guidelines on Implementation have been developed. The pledges by INGO and NGO exceed 37,000 units.

As of April 22, the number of temporary houses completed was 18,442. Work on a further 9081 are in progress. In addition to these 711, a further 578 have been completed in Jaffna and Mulletivu districts respectively.

Coastal Conservation

The Government decided to demarcate a coastal buffer zone of 100 m and 200 m for public security and to protect the coastal belt and improve its ecology. This is to provide a natural defence from similar disasters. The Coastal Greenbelt Project was launched to demarcate the 100 and 200 m boundaries, physically mark the areas in consultation with the authorities responsible for rebuilding and relocating to ensure minimum hardships to those affected, establish green vegetation in coastal areas affected clearing debris from lagoons and reefs and to repair conservation structures such as breakwaters.

Results

The first phase was completed successfully, with the Sri Lanka and Foreign Governments, the UN and international agencies and local and international NGOs and private individuals working in collaboration.

- None died of starvation and no malnutrition seen
- No deaths due to lack of medical care
- No disease outbreaks
- Law and order situation effectively maintained
- Basic infrastructure such as roads, telecommunications and electricity restored within a week.
- Visiting foreign leaders including the Secretary-General of UN, the Secretary of State of the USA, President of World Bank commended the way the Sri Lankan government handled the first phase of the rescue and relief operations.

Challenges

- Provision of interim accommodation
- Identification of land for interim and permanent housing
- Debris clearance
- Overlapping and gaps of pledges
- Relief/Reconstruction Alternatives
- Intra-sectoral coordination (e.g. shelter, water, sanitation, livelihood)

--❧--