

POST TSUNAMI RECOVERY AND RECONSTRUCTION IMPLEMENTATION STRUCTURE

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Background

In the immediate aftermath of the tsunami on 26th December 2004, the government swung into action with an Operations Centre being set up on the directive of the Prime Minister, which commenced functioning in the forenoon of 26th December 2004. This centre was located in the official residence of the Prime Minister and functioned under his supervision. This Operations Centre liaised with the Presidential Secretariat, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Public Security, Law & Order, Department of Social Services, the Armed Forces, and the Police. It also had working links with all media.

A few hours after tsunami waves struck Sri Lanka, the Operations Room was able to establish communication links with all the District Secretaries/Government Agents with a view to assessing the immediate damage caused to human lives and property. The immediate task of this Operations Centre was to provide immediate relief by way of cooked food, drinking water, medicine, clothing etc., and help people, both foreign and local to locate their relatives, who had gone missing. In this task, the centre co-ordinated with the agencies of the government and the private sector to deliver the services that were essential.

Appointment of a Cabinet sub-committee and a High level all party committee

On the day of the tsunamis, an emergency meeting of the Cabinet of Ministers was also held under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister and a sub-committee was appointed chaired by the Prime Minister. Later, H.E the President reconstituted this committee and expanded it, retaining the Prime Minister as its chairman. As the need was felt for all political parties represented in Parliament to be able to contribute to the decision making process, a High level all party committee was established under the chairmanship of H.E the President. This committee met fairly regularly at the beginning to discuss relief measures as well as the longer term rehabilitation programme. Further, reports of the Task Forces were also presented to this high level committee.

Appointment of the Task Forces and setting up of the Centre for National Operations

Three days after the tsunami, i.e. 29th December 2004, the H.E the President established a Centre for National Operations (CNO) in the Presidential Secretariat to coordinate all efforts and initiatives in regard to relief, recovery and other related aspects, for the welfare and benefit of those who were affected by the tsunami.

The Centre for National Operations was overseen by a Task Force appointed by H.E the President i.e. Task Force for Rescue and Relief (TAFRER). Two other Task Forces were also appointed by H.E the President, namely, the Task Force for Logistics and Law & Order (TAFLOL) and the Task Force for Rebuilding the Nation (TAFREN).

Each task force had a Terms of Reference (TOR) to achieve the overall objective of providing relief to those affected and restoring normalcy in the country as soon as possible. TOR of each of the task forces is as follows:

TAFRER

1. Collecting, analysing and tabulating data of those affected by the tsunami disaster and compiling an on-going Needs Assessment for all sectors.
2. Coordination and facilitation of the Implementation process of all Rescue, Relief and Rehabilitation activities through the relevant line ministries, District Secretaries/Government Agents and other relevant Government authorities, with respect to persons and areas affected by the tsunami disaster.
3. Coordination of all international donor assistance, Voluntary services and NGO assistance and rehabilitation activities in consultation with the Ministry of Finance and Planning, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other relevant Line Ministries.

TAFLOL

1. Coordinating logistical activities regarding relief work, i.e. receiving goods and services from local and foreign sources at the airport and the port (working in coordination with the Ministry of Ports and Aviation) and facilitating easy access for goods from abroad by coordinating with the relevant Government Agencies such as Customs/Immigration and Emigration etc.
2. Coordinating arrangements to secure storage, transport and distribute food and other essential commodities to the victims of the tsunami disaster, in close conjunction and consultation with TAFRER and the Centre for National Operations at the Presidential Secretariat.
3. Ensure proper Law and Order and Security in the tsunami-affected areas in order that relief activities can be implemented speedily and that the victims of the tsunami disaster are not subject to harassment and exploitation.
4. All relations with foreign and local donors and relief agencies to be handled by the Secretary to the Treasury and the Secretary to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs following normal, accepted procedures.

The two task forces, TAFRER and TAFLOL had short- to medium- term mandate while the TAFREN had a more long-term one, that of Rebuilding the Nation. The TOR of the TAFREN was as follows:

1. Assessment of Damage
2. Develop a detailed and comprehensive Development and Infrastructure Rebuilding Action Plan, to be commenced on 15th January 2005 and completed within one year. The following areas to be given priority;
 - a. Hospitals
 - b. Schools
 - c. Power
 - d. Roads and Bridges
 - e. Railway
 - f. Water Supply and Drainage
 - g. Telecom
 - h. Tourism
 - i. Housing, Urban Development and Environment
 - j. Insurance and Financing Services
 - k. Fisheries
3. Coordinate and implement the approved Action Plan (referred to in 2 above), through the relevant line ministries, relevant Government authorities and agencies, state and private sector organizations, District Secretaries/Government Agents and relevant local Government agencies.
4. Coordinate all donor Assistance, fund raising and other financing avenues towards achieving the Development and Infrastructure Rebuilding Action Plan (referred to in 2 above), in consultation with the Ministry of Finance and Planning, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the relevant line ministries.
5. To prepare a draft bill to be presented to Parliament in January 2005 as an urgent bill to set up the Authority for Rebuilding the Nation. (Successor to TAFREN).

Concurrent with the appointment of the task forces, H.E the President also appointed a Commissioner General of Essential Services (the Secretary, Ministry of Public Security, Law and Order was appointed to this post in addition to his substantive duties) to ensure relief operations and efficient management of the camps established for the displaced affected by the tsunamis.

Early February 2005, H.E the President directed the winding up of the activities of the CNO and the TAFRER and merged their activities with TAFLOL and the Office of the Commissioner General of Essential Services (CGES) and set up one task force, TAFLOL with the following TOR.

Terms of Reference of TAFLOL

1. Coordinating logistical activities regarding relief work i.e. receiving goods and services from local and foreign sources at the airport and port (working in coordination with the Ministry of Ports and Aviation) and facilitating easy access for goods from abroad by coordinating with the relevant government agencies such as Customs/Immigration etc.
2. Coordinating arrangements to secure storage, transport and distribute for food and other essential commodities to the victims of the tsunami disaster, in close conjunction and consultation with TAFRER and the National Operations Centre at the Presidential Secretariat.
3. Ensuring proper law and order and security in the tsunami affected areas in order that relief activities can be implemented speedily and that the victims of the tsunami disaster are not subject to harassment and exploitation.

District Level Implementation

14 Districts out of 25 districts in the country were affected by the tsunami disaster. Each district is administratively headed by a District Secretary/Government Agent. Under his charge, there is a District Secretariat, which consists of district level representatives of various central Ministries and Departments. After the disaster, the Government Agents were gazetted by Her Excellency the President as Competent Authority for their respective districts. This enabled the District Secretaries to function without any constraint with the power and authority to requisition resources, supplies, manpower etc. to undertake recovery and relief measures.

The district level administration was guided by one or two ministers appointed to oversee the relief and rebuilding operations. These appointments were made by H.E the President.

The sub-district administrative structure is the Divisional Secretariat. Each DS division comprises of a number of Grama Seva Niladhari (GSN) divisions. The Grama Seva Niladhari is the government official who interacts most with the people. People's first contact in transacting business with the government is the GSN who provides a large number of public services to the people. Therefore, in the case of post tsunami administration too, the real implementation of relief and rebuilding efforts took place at the GSN level. This is the case. Even now. All relief packages to the people are delivered through the GSNs and DSs. Relief and other measures aimed at normalizing people's lives, which are the result of Government's decisions, reach the people through DS/GSN combination.

Reconstruction

Large and medium scale reconstruction projects are implemented by line ministries and departments of the government with TAFREN playing the role of the coordinator. In the case of housing, the government has set up the Tsunami Housing Reconstruction Unit (THRU) within the Urban Development Authority (UDA) to coordinate the housing effort of the government. Its main objectives are to locate suitable land, acquire private lands if state lands are not available, and undertake housing construction projects for tsunami affected persons in the 14 districts affected by the tsunami.

Issues to be addressed

1. Absence of a disaster management centre/mechanism at the time of the tsunami made relief and rescue efforts difficult.
2. Lack of expertise to handle the post-disaster situation at central, district and divisional levels.
3. Absence of a national/district/divisional level disaster management plan.
4. No proper civilian-military co-operation in handling disasters.

