

INTERTECT
Sri Lanka Reconstruction Project
Advisory Mission

SITREPS
prepared by Frederick C. Cuny
Feb. - June 1988

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INTERTECT
Taj Samudran Hotel
Room 419

14 February 1988

To: Peter Bloom,
From: Fred Cuny

Subject: Concerns of the GAs regarding reconstruction activities

During the recent Disaster Preparedness workshop conducted by AIT, there were several meetings of the GAs from the North and East. One of these was with the Minister of Home Affairs, the others were informal meetings held by the GAs themselves to discuss problems in their areas and the recent threats against them. Several points seem to have come up that may affect our reconstruction activities.

1. I was informed by one of the GAs that the LTTE has told them that any reconstruction planning must include them and that no reconstruction or rehabilitation activities should begin until the GAs are told to begin.

2. Everett Ressler (of AIT) told me that at the meeting with the Minister, one of the major concerns of the GAs was the housing reconstruction program. The GAs are not only worried about the reaction of the LTTE if they try to carry out any activities, even surveys, but they (the GAs) want to be more involved in the planning process. Ressler says that in the general meetings of the workshop, these concerns were also expressed and that several GAs said they were concerned that the international donors were making reconstruction plans that would ultimately be rejected by the LTTE. He said that the GAs told him on several occasions that the GAs said that the local people (Tamils) saw the housing reconstruction plans as a test of the overall devolution process.

Note: It was unclear how the GAs or the Tamils view the role of the NGOs in this matter.

Comments: Given these concerns, I think we should believe that we should continue to work through the NGOs for the time being. They have been working in the housing sector throughout the conflict and we can use them for collecting information, doing assessments, etc. For their safety, we should limit these activities however, and for practical reasons we should be careful to couch all references to housing in terms of temporary or interim assistance.

cc: George West, World Bank
Jeremy Haggar, Office of Housing, AID

INTERTECT
Taj Samudran Hotel
Room 419

17 February 1988

To: Peter Bloom,
From: Fred Cuny

Subject: Displaced persons in welfare centers in Anuradapura

On 16 February I visited three welfare centers ("refugee camps") in the Anuradapura area and held discussions with T.K. Dissanayake, the GA, about the situation regarding displaced persons in his district. One of the centers housed Sinhalese displaced in October, one housed Muslims displaced in October, and the other housed Sinhalese displaced in 1985. There were several points that came up as a result of the visit which are worth noting.

1. About 30% of the Sinhalese displaced since October have returned.
2. Among those remaining it appears that a significant percentage of the families are headed by a man who was in the Home Guards (37% in the center we visited). Each said they fled when they were disarmed by the IPKF and that they feared reprisals by their Tamil neighbors. I suspect that a large number of this group will be difficult to return to their previous homes.
3. Almost all the Muslim DPs expressed fears about the presence of the IPKF (which they view as a Hindu and Sikh army) and the safety of their women. These people will probably not return until the IPKF has departed. However, in many ways, these people are the least of our worries since the vast majority of them have been taken in by Muslim villagers (the centers are located in Muslim villages) and there are only about 10% of the families still living in the centers.
4. In the center for persons displaced between 1985-87, there were a significant number of Sinhalese who claimed to have fled and relocated several times before. Several families we talked to said that they had fled from Jaffna in the 1958 disturbances, moved from there in the 1963 disturbances to Vavuniya, fled from there in 1968, and now have fled the '85 troubles. All those who have moved from Jaffna and have been displaced more than once say they will not go back into a Tamil controlled area.

Comments: At the present time it is government policy that refugees and displaced persons should only receive help if they return to their original place of origin. I think we should encourage the government to review this policy and in cases like those who have been displaced more than once, the Home Guards, and others who face a real threat of reprisal, they should be helped to find homes and jobs in other parts of the country. Numerically, these groups would probably be relatively small, but for the time being, it would help reduce the number of people being sheltered and would give the government a chance to test out their assistance systems on a fairly small scale.

I think that we should also anticipate that whatever the final settlement terms are, that there will be a number of people who will not want to remain a minority in the new zones. After every political realignment, there have been displaced persons. What would happen for example, if the LTTE went through the area after the new structure were in place and told the Muslims to leave? There are going to be pockets of people whose population is small enough that that they will not be willing or able to resist threats like these. Developing on a small scale the systems for helping people relocate out of their original areas will give us an opportunity to have some systems in place in case they are needed on a bigger scale in the future.

Other notes: All the people we saw are in good shape. The centers are well run, people have adequate space, and I saw no signs of malnutrition, disease, or any threats to public health. All centers are regularly attended by health and medical personnel and no one reported any major complaints.

In the older center, one certainly got the impression that a relief mentality had set in, that the people have been there too long and that now they expect everything to be provided by the government.

Regarding those people who have already been returned from the centers, we can expect some administrative difficulties regarding payments. Initially, the GA in Anuradapura issued a part of the allowances and the GA in the district they returned to was to make the other part. However, in many cases the people left while the Katcheries were still functioning but did not receive their monies before they were closed. In some cases the people returned to other camps and have registered as "new refugees" but in most the people are still waiting for their payments. If the katcheries remain closed, we might want to shift some of the responsibility for assisting returnees to the NGOs.

CONFIDENTIAL

INTERTECT

Reconstruction Advisory Mission

14 April 1988

To: D.J. Bandaragoda
From: Fred Cuny

Subject: Exercising caution in the road construction projects

In March there was quite a bit of optimism about the ability of RDA and local district highway construction offices to begin work on rehabilitation and reconstruction of roads in the North and East. The GA's have unconsciously encouraged this optimism; when replying to questions about security, they assure us that certain areas within their districts are currently trouble-free and, therefore, road construction activities can begin in those zones.

The primary target of militants in the North and East was never housing nor infrastructure such as schools or hospitals - those were blown up by government forces. The main target was always the roads since roads were the key to controlling access to the region. I suspect that if we had the ability to assess all of the roads, we would find the ones that are available for immediate repair and reconstruction are probably the least damaged and the fact that we can work there at present doesn't really tell us anything about the strategy of the militants regarding what reconstruction activities they will permit. In a separatist war, the conflict goes to where the government is.

I've suggested to the Secretary and the C.E.O. that we should exercise some degree of caution before encouraging RDA or the GA's to initiate large scale works projects. Housing, agriculture and fishing are not as likely to be targeted since the majority of the people receiving that assistance will be Tamils. Road activities that we can carry out in towns or on non-strategic roads using local contractors and private equipment are also probably fairly safe. But any major reconstruction of highways, bridges, culverts, etc., may be provocative, and all we would need is for one culvert or one bridge that has been rebuilt to be blown up by the militants and the donors will probably freeze further road reconstruction activities.

INTERTECT

RECONSTRUCTION ADVISORY MISSION

8 MAY 1988

To: D.J. Bandaragoda
From: Fred Cuny

Subject: Emergency Response Trip to Trincomalee

Our trip to Trincomalee and to the Serunuwara peninsula was a very sad experience for the whole team. Not only were the horrors of the current situation brought home very poignantly but the frustrations that the people feel after six years of conflict was heavy in the air. For them the Peace Accord is a fleeting hope and day by day their patience and willingness to remain in place is further tested.

This was my first trip to Trinco since September but I found the situation very much as I had expected based on the reports that we have been receiving from Ari and from the voluntary agencies operating in the area.

Regarding the relief situation, I think that it is obvious that if attacks on persons from the communities in the peninsula continue we will see a further exodus of people to safer areas in the South. People made it clear that they did not want to leave but they want the Sri Lankan army to return to the area in force to give them protection. For the present, I do not think that this is likely to happen. The Sri Lankan forces are much less in evidence now than they were in September. There is only one helicopter operating out of Trinco and the big Sri Lankan bases in the area appear to have shrunk considerably. In our briefings from the colonel at the Combined Command headquarters, it seems clear that most of the Sri Lankan forces have been transferred to the South. It is also clear that the Indian Peace Keeping Force is stretched fairly thin in Trinco and that most of the peace keeping operations are going to be more to the north and west of the city and not in the peninsula. There are simply not enough people in the peninsula to justify a large force.

Given the situation wherein people in the peninsula are almost entirely dependent on the road between Kallar and Kantale, unless alternate routes are open where the people can go to Trinco to get the supplies that they need instead of having to take the bus to Kantale, we are likely to see several more incidents such as this one over the next few months; actions which would result in even more departures for the South.

I understand that in the past there was a large ferry that operated from Kinniyai to Trinco but that the ferry was sunk during the conflict and now people must journey by road to Kinniyai to make the ferry connection to Trinco. One option that we might explore

would be to find a donor to provide another ferry large enough to carry a bus between Trinco and Kinniyai, or better still, directly to the old ferry landing at Matur. If I remember correctly, there are some monies donated in the transport sector which could be used for replacing ferries in Trinco so we might be able to tap into that money or, alternatively, to find an international volag that has enough resources to donate a ferry (OXFAM has made several such donations to Bangladesh).

Operationally, it would be interesting to know what happens in the area - how many people leave in the next month and where they go. We might ask the GAs in the south to report any movements of D.P.s from that area for if there is an exodus, it may warrant asking the Sri Lankan forces to beef up the security force in the area.

One of the things that the army wants, is for the reconstruction programme to give priority to the reconstruction of the Kantale-Kallar road. At one time it was a metal road but after years of disrepair it is now more a rock and gravel road and it is very easy for the insurgents to place explosives with little chance of detection. The army would like for us to resurface the road with metal, feeling it would make it harder to mine, and if mined, easier to detect.

I would recommend that we not bend to these pressures. If someone wants to blow up a bus on that road they can do it by mining the culverts or burrowing in from the side of an embankment. Resurfacing the road will have little effect and by moving road teams out into that area we might be putting people at risk. Any heavy equipment, such as bulldozers, road graders or rollers, would likewise be subject to attack and an incident on that road involving the deaths of road crews or the loss of heavy equipment might result in a suspension of World Bank and ADB funding for road reconstruction.

In talking to the villagers, we heard a number of complaints against the AGA -- charges of corruption in dispersing benefits and compensations, and complaints that he is rarely available to the people. These should be investigated.

Unfortunately, due to time constraints, we were unable to visit villages that I have visited previously in the area. Therefore, I have few observations to make about the status of reconstruction efforts in this zone. I noticed as we flew over one part of Trinco town that a number of commercial structures that had been blown up prior to the peace accord were still not cleared and that there was no visible sign that reconstruction in the commercial zones had begun. I suspect that, like Jaffna, people are still waiting before they invest their own money in any kind of reconstruction. The situation is still too dicey.

As you know Paul Hohnen from the Australian High Commission was also on a visit to Trinco. He visited with the GA and some of the NGOs and we chatted on the way back. He feels that it would be very difficult for the GA to carry out widespread reconstruction

activities in all of the sectors but his talks with the NGOs indicated that many people are ready to begin housing reconstruction, rebuilding small businesses and replanting agricultural fields. According to the NGOs all they need are the resources, he said.

Other observations:

While it is obvious that incidents like these call into question the whole strategy of continuing to work in reconstruction during this period of uncertainty, and should make us reconsider thoroughly activities designed to encourage people to move back to the more unstable areas in the North and East, the locations of the incidents and the continued concentration of most of the incidents against civilians in the eastern corridor and near mixed communities could be a sign that in fact, the secret negotiations taking place in India may be nearing a conclusion which could bring at least a temporary cessation of hostilities. I say this without any proof, just a feeling, but in my previous experience in similar situations, just before a truce is concluded, the level of violence escalates dramatically (as the sides try to make territorial or political gains). I would suspect that before the Tigers lay down their arms we will see a major escalation of violence designed to try to drive Muslim and Sinhalese communities out of the area to try to change the ethnic balance for any future referenda. In other words, they'll want to leave an inedible imprint on people's memories so that even if peace is restored, the people who have left will be reluctant to return.

Because of this possibility we should probably consider the following actions:

1. Designate some people from the Ministry to work closely with Trinco to try and respond immediately to any problems in the area.
2. Meet with the JOC to outline our concerns and find ways of both isolating and supplying these people if the violence reaches a certain threshold. In places like the peninsula we may need to provide an alternate supply route and if conditions get bad move food and other necessities in under military escort.
3. Develop contingency plans so that if a large migration of people does occur we can direct them to the nearest safe area and shelter them quickly so that they don't disperse all over the country. (Our objective here should be to keep them from going to other welfare centers scattered throughout the South and spreading fear that may delay the return of others once the cease-fire comes into effect).
4. We have to recognize that there are going to be some people who are simply not going to be willing to stay in that area. Raja met one family who had lost eight members in four separate incidents. In cases like those, we need to make arrangements for people to be relocated swiftly to places of their choice, perhaps on government lands in other safer, areas.

Based on past flows of displaced persons, I believe that we could expect most Sinhalese and Muslims to evacuate via Kantale and then south-west along the Anaradhapura road. We should probably brief T.K. about our concerns and suggest to him that he might want to take some extra precaution in case new groups of refugees come out of that area if the fighting or the number of terrorist activities against civilians were to increase.