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REACTION TO ASIAN DEVELOPMENTS (2,500)

FOX BUTTERFIELD, NEW YORK TIMES 6-5-73

HOAI TAN, SOUTH VIETNAM -- AFTER A YEAR AS REFUGEES, THE PEOPLE OF THIS DEVASTATED CENTRAL VIETNAM VILLAGE RETURNED HOME RECENTLY UNDER GOVERNMENT PRODDING. BUT NOW THEY WISH THEY HAD STAYED IN THEIR SAFE IF SQUALID REFUGEE CAMP.

FOR THEY HAVE NO FOOD, NO SEEDS TO PLANT THEIR CROPS, ONLY THE FLIMSIEST THATCH HUTS FOR SHELTER, AND THEY ARE CONSTANTLY CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNIST TROOPS EACH ENCAMPED ONLY A FEW HUNDRED YARDS AWAY.

"THE GOVERNMENT TOLD US TO COME BACK AND PROMISED US EVERYTHING -- RICE, FERTILIZER, HOUSES, SCHOOLS -- BUT THAT WAS ALL TALK," SAID DANG TUC, A WIZENED 60-YEAR-OLD FARMER IN A TATTERED BLACK SHIRT AND OLIVE-DRAB ARMY UNDERSHORTS. "OUR OFFICIALS ARE COWARDS, HIDING IN THE SOLDIERS' OUTPOSTS AND EATING THE RICE THEY ARE SUPPOSED TO GIVE TO US."

MR. TUC'S PROBLEM IS ONE FACED BY SOME 150,000 REFUGEES HERE IN BINH DINH PROVINCE, WHO WERE SWEEPED OUT OF THEIR HOMES DURING THE COMMUNISTS' BIG OFFENSIVE LAST SPRING AND THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE ARMY'S DRIVE DURING THE SUMMER TO TRY TO RETAKE THE NORTHERN HALF OF THE PROVINCE.

BECAUSE NEITHER SIDE HAS MANAGED TO GAIN CLEAR CONTROL OVER THE NORTHERN DISTRICTS OF BINH DINH -- SOUTH VIETNAM'S MOST POPULOUS AND LONG ONE OF ITS MOST HEAVILY COMMUNIST PROVINCES -- ALMOST NONE OF THE REFUGEES HAD VENTURED BACK UNTIL A FEW WEEKS AGO. NOW ABOUT 40,000 OF THEM HAVE BEEN TAKEN BY

ARMY TRUCKS FROM THE CROWDED REFUGEE CAMPS OUTSIDE QUI NHON IN THE SOUTHERN PART OF THE PROVINCE AND DROPPED ALONG ROUTE 1 NEAR THEIR OLD VILLAGES.

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SAIGON'S OBJECTIVES IN THIS MOVE, ACCORDING TO UNITED STATES AND VIETNAMESE OFFICIALS HERE, ARE TO REDUCE THE BURDEN OF FEEDING SO MANY PEOPLE AND TO REPOPULATE THE AREA SO THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL CONTROL THE MAJORITY OF VOTES IN ANY FUTURE ELECTION.

BUT AT THE SAME TIME IT APPEARS THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS ALIENATING MANY OF THE REFUGEES BY COERCING THEM INTO MOVING AND FAILING TO PROVIDE EVEN THE MOST ELEMENTARY RELIEF SUPPLIES AND SECURITY...

THERE IS NOTHING LEFT OF THE ORIGINAL HOAI TAN VILLAGE, WHICH WAS MIDWAY BETWEEN ROUTE 1 AND A JUNGLE-COVERED RIDGE OF THE ANNAMITE MOUNTAINS A FEW MILES TO THE WEST. A NEW VILLAGE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL HAS BEEN OPENED IN A TENT, BUT IT IS STAFFED BY TWO VOLUNTEER BUDDHIST MONKS FROM SAIGON RATHER THAN BY THE GOVERNMENT TEACHERS WHO APPARENTLY WERE TOO AFRAID TO REPORT FOR DUTY HERE.

THE VILLAGERS SEEM TO CARE LITTLE FOR EITHER THE COMMUNISTS OR THE GOVERNMENT, FEARING THE FORMER AND DETESTING THE LATTER.

A FORMER VILLAGE POLICEMAN, FOR EXAMPLE, WHO WAS CAPTURED BY THE COMMUNISTS LAST SPRING AND MADE TO HELP BUILD ROADS IN THE JUNGLE, WAS HAPPY TO BE RELEASED TWO WEEKS AGO IN AN EXCHANGE OF CIVILIAN PRISONERS. BUT THE POLICEMAN, THANH QUAN LAN, IS QUIETLY FURIOUS WITH THE WAY THE GOVERNMENT HAS TREATED HIM SINCE HIS RETURN.

HE HAS RECEIVED NO MEDICAL CARE FOR THE MALARIA HE CONTRACTED IN PRISON, HE HAS BEEN UNABLE TO OBTAIN ANY OF HIS BACK PAY, AND HIS FAMILY HAS GOTTEN NOTHING MORE THAN A FEW SHEETS OF TIN ROOFING AND A BLANKET AS RELIEF SUPPLIES...