

# ***BANGLADESH: CYCLONE***

**appeal no: 11/97**  
**21st May 1997**

***THIS PRELIMINARY APPEAL SEEKS  
CHF 3,000,000 IN CASH TO ASSIST  
10,000 FAMILIES FOR 2 MONTHS***

## ***Summary***

A cyclone hit the South Eastern coast of Bangladesh during the evening of 19 May, creating a trail of devastation along the coast between Chittagong and Teknaf and leaving some 500,000 people homeless. The Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) has already begun distributing food and tarpaulins and is preparing to provide food rations and temporary shelter and housing materials to the worst affected in the course of the next two months. The thrust of the operation has been determined by aerial and land surveys and information from the BDRCS cyclone preparedness network. As further information becomes available, the number of beneficiaries and the aid to be given may be adjusted.

## ***The Intended Operation***

The Bangladesh Red Crescent Society, with support from the Federation that included a CHF 200,000 advance from the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF), has mobilised resources to carry out an immediate relief operation. An emergency 5-day food ration, consisting of 7.5 kg chira (compressed rice), 2.5 kg ghur (molasses), 0.5 kg iodised salt, plus tarpaulins to provide temporary shelter, is being distributed to 1,000 families. Another 1,000 families will receive an allocation of dates.

In a second phase of the emergency relief operation, and in view of the large scale damage to housing, 10,000 families will be provided with materials to construct iron-roofed, bamboo framed houses. It is planned that a further 800 families will receive corrugated iron sheeting for roofing.

Distributions will take place in the worst-affected areas of the Districts of Chittagong, Cox's Bazar and Teknaf. They will be carried out through the three BDRCS Units (Branches) of Chittagong City, Chittagong District and Cox's Bazar District. The local Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP) staff and volunteer network will be available to provide support to the Units.

## *The Disaster*

A severe tropical cyclone "One Bravo" which had been gathering intensity in the Bay of Bengal, struck the south-eastern coast of Bangladesh on Monday, 19 May. It crossed the Chittagong-Feni coast north of Chittagong at approximately 18.30 hours. The cyclone created serious damage and flooding in the eastern coastal belt area of Bangladesh, which is home to approximately four million people.

The main effects were felt along the 200 kilometre-long coastal area between the port city of Chittagong and Teknaf, at the southern tip of Bangladesh. This densely populated coastal flatland was swept by torrential rain, flooding and violent winds, which left more than 500,000 people homeless.

Although the wind speeds were up to 250 kilometres per hour, there was no tidal surge accompanying the cyclone. The relatively small loss of life, in comparison with the 140,000 people killed when a cyclone hit the same coastal area in 1991, can be attributed partly to the absence of the tidal bore, but also to the effectiveness of the BDRCS cyclone preparedness programme. The community-awareness campaigns, warning systems and enhanced communications, plus the mobilisation of 15,000 volunteers in the affected area, were key to the successful evacuation of the vulnerable population. Approximately one million people took refuge in the cyclone shelters, thus significantly reducing the potential number of deaths.

As of 21 May, reports through the CPP network from 27 Districts give the following figures: an estimated 100 deaths, over 7,000 people injured and some 250,000 families affected. Housing suffered major damage, with an estimated 100,000 houses totally destroyed. Although 80% of the crops had already been harvested before the cyclone struck, thousands of acres of crops remaining in the low-lying areas were totally destroyed. The Cox's Bazar District was particularly affected by crop damage, since betel leaf crops, salt beds and shrimp cultures were devastated, which will seriously jeopardise the livelihood of the local population.

## *The Response so far*

### **Government Action •**

Government activities in response to the disaster are coordinated by the Prime Minister's office. In each of the affected Districts, a Minister was appointed by the Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, to monitor the response and a Disaster Control cell was set up in Chittagong. The government provided a helicopter to enable the donor community to conduct an aerial survey of the damage.

### **Red Cross/Red Crescent Action •**

The BDRCS CPP staff at Headquarters have been closely monitoring the situation via the 140 radio stations in the coastal belt. The CPP volunteers immediately conducted on-the-ground preliminary assessments of damage and are constantly updating this information which is fed through the radio network to the BDRCS Headquarters.

On 19th May 1997, the BDRCS/Federation Delegation despatched three teams of staff to the affected areas in order to collect information relating to the damage. The teams are currently located between Chittagong and Cox's Bazar.

On 20th May, the BDRCS sent two relief trucks from the National Headquarters to Chittagong and Cox's Bazar. The trucks distributed 400 tarpaulins, 20 rolls of plastic sheeting, 100 jerry cans, 500 mugs, 500 pieces of crockery, 500 aluminium plates, 5,000 pieces of second-hand clothing, 50 bars of soap, 1 ton of compressed rice and 120 kilos of ghur. The Branches of Chittagong City, Chittagong District and Cox's Bazar have mobilised their Unit Executive Committees and the BDRCS Unit Officers are responsible for coordinating relief activities.

The BDRCS/Federation chartered a plane in order to conduct an aerial survey of the coastal belt between Chittagong and Teknaf; the assessment took place on 20th May and continued today, 21st May. The information obtained from the survey, together with the reports issued through the CPP network and the details provided by the BDRCS/Federation mobile teams form the basis of the damage assessment and information as to the immediate needs of the affected population.

#### **Other Agencies' Action •**

The NGO Affairs Bureau will coordinate with NGOs in order to make drinking water, food, medicine, water purifying tablets available. Major international NGOs active in Bangladesh are currently formulating plans for assistance to the affected population.

#### **Coordination •**

The BDRCS/Federation is participating in the coordination meetings of UNDP and in the NGO Disaster Forum meetings. The Acting Secretary General of the BDRCS regularly attends meetings of the Inter-Ministerial Disaster Management and Coordination Committee.

## ***The Needs to be met***

#### **Assessment of Needs •**

According to the findings of an aerial survey of the affected area, reports from the CPP volunteer network and information gathered through the BDRCS/Federation mobile teams, the most vulnerable among the half million affected people are in need of short term food rations and temporary shelter. Since a vast number of homes were either totally or partially destroyed, reconstruction needs will be the highest priority.

## ***Red Crescent Objectives***

- To assist those affected by the cyclone disaster of 19 May 1997, by providing immediate emergency food rations.
- To assist those families who lost their homes by providing temporary shelter materials and materials with which to reconstruct their homes.

## ***National Society/Federation Plan of Action***

#### **Emergency Phase: 21st May 1997 - 31st May 1997 •**

Provision of emergency food rations to 1,000 families, together with tarpaulins for temporary shelter. A further 1,000 families will receive an allocation of dates.

**Phase Two: 1st June - 21st July 1997 •**

Provision of house frames and roofing material to 10,000 families and corrugated iron sheets to a further 800 families.

**Capacity of the National Society •**

The BDRCS Branches, together with the network of CPP volunteers, have the experience and the capacity to implement the planned relief operation. A Cyclone Relief control room has been set up at National Headquarters to coordinate activities.

**Present Capacity of the Federation in Bangladesh •**

The Federation Delegation is currently made up of a Head of Delegation, a Relief Delegate, a Disaster Preparedness Delegate, a Logistics Coordinator, a Construction Delegate, a Telecommunications Delegate, and a Reporting and Administration Delegate.

**Evaluation •**

Monitoring of the distributions will be carried out by the BDRCS/Federation Delegation. Situation Reports will be submitted to the donors in accordance with standard procedures.

## ***Budget summary***

A budget summary will be made available within the next few days.

## ***Conclusion***

The south-eastern coastal belt of Bangladesh is an impoverished region where the population lives in great hardship. Since up to 80% of the harvest had been gathered at the time of the cyclone, there are no food shortages, and this appeal includes only a five day emergency ration for 1,000 families who lost all their possessions in the disaster. It focuses on assistance to those worst affected by the disaster, aiming to help them by providing temporary shelter materials and enabling them to reconstruct their homes.

Margareta Wahlström  
Under Secretary General,  
Disaster Response Operations Coordination

George Weber  
Secretary General