

INFORMATION BULLETIN



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

BANGLADESH: COLD WAVE

3 January 2002

Information Bulletin N° 1

Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) Allocated: CHF 50,000

This Information Bulletin is being issued in support of needs described below. A DREF allocation of CHF 50,000 has been made by the Federation to facilitate action and donors are strongly urged to reimburse the fund as soon as possible. The allocation will also enable the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) to increase the level of its buffer stocks of blankets in advance of any future cold spells or similar emergencies.

The Situation

Since mid December 2002, a severe cold spell has been sweeping northern India and Nepal, but its effects have been most keenly felt to date in Bangladesh, a country with a tropical monsoon climate where winters are generally mild and short. Single-figure temperatures have been recorded throughout the country. According to the Meteorological Department, temperatures have been dropping to 6 degrees Celsius in some areas, and to between 8 and 11 Celsius in others. The lowest ever recorded temperature of 3 Celsius was recorded in the northern region on 31 December. The most affected areas are the northern and north-western districts of Bangladesh. The cold wave has been worsened by thick fog which paralysed normal life and has kept daytime temperatures very low, also causing massive damage in the agricultural sector.



The wind coming from the north and flowing over the northern and south-western part of the country has enhanced the intensity of cold. These temperatures are perceived as severe cold by the general population, who are used to much warmer weather, even at this time of the year. It is causing extreme hardship for undernourished and underweight members of the population. These include people who lost their homes and possessions during the floods of 2002. Thousands of people, suffering from cold related diseases (cold, fevers, pneumonia, asthma, respiratory complications) in the 15 affected districts, have approached medical centres for treatments. There have been more than 240 cold related deaths to date. The death toll is expected to rise as more information is yet to be collected from the more remote areas.

The Government has distributed 5,000 blankets from its disaster emergency stocks. In addition, the Prime Minister has appealed to all humanitarian organisations in-country to assist the suffering population by distributing blankets and warm clothing to the most needy, children and elderly. Local NGOs have started to distribute small quantities

of warm clothing and blankets in the northern districts of Panchagar. According to the Meteorological Department, the cold wave will intensify (5-7 Celsius) and is likely to continue through January.

Northern India and Nepal, where lower temperatures during the winter months are more the norm, have also been affected by the cold snap including parts of west Madya Pradesh, North Madya, Maharashtra and Rajasthan. A temperature of 7 degrees Celsius was recorded in Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh, with Ludhiana in (Punjab) experiencing 2.5 degrees Celsius and Ganganagar and Udaipur (Rajastan) a low of 5.5 degrees Celsius. India-based international media have reported 52 deaths in Uttar Pradesh caused by the untimely cold spell and a heavy blanket of snow.



In Nepal, a cold wave hitting both eastern and western Tarai districts in the south of the country, has crippled the daily activities of thousands of people engaged in winter vegetable cultivation. A large number of children have been affected and are suffering from gastroenteritis, according to local media reports. Over the new year period, the temperature in Kathmandu hovered between 1 and 3.5 degrees Celsius and across the country, the inclement weather is adversely impacting normal life.

The Red Cross Societies in both countries are responding at present to the emergency by utilising their volunteer networks and existing disaster preparedness resources.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The BDRCS and the Federation have been closely monitoring climatic developments as events have unfolded. Once the country was firmly in the grip of the cold wave, with no sign of improvement, the death toll started to increase and assessment reports (requests for assistance) from the Society's district units began arriving. As an immediate response to the growing emergency, the BDRCS, from its own emergency stock, distributed 4,000 blankets, 1,500 pieces of second hand clothing and a limited quantity of high protein biscuits to 5,500 beneficiaries in the north western districts of Thakurgaon (500 blankets), Nilphamari (500), Lalmonirhat (500), Kurigram (500), Dinajpur (400), Gaibandha (500), Sirajganj (500), Panchagar (500) and an orphanage in Jamaplur (100).

In Dhaka, from 3-7 January, twelve teams of four Red Crescent youth and volunteers are collecting second hand clothing through door-to-door visits in the more affluent areas of the capital. All items donated are to be distributed immediately to meet the rising needs of the most underprivileged population in the affected districts. At the request of the BDRCS, the International Federation is also advancing CHF 50,000 from its disaster relief emergency fund (DREF) for additional procurement and distribution of blankets in those areas where assistance is now most needed and the highest death toll has been recorded: The BDRCS and Federation objectives are to:

- Deliver emergency assistance to the most needy in the hardest hit districts of: Pabna, Jaipurhat, Rangpur, Nilphamari, Thakurgaon, Dinajpur, Kurigram, Lalmonirhat and Gaibandha.
- Immediately assist 5,500 beneficiaries in these nine districts by providing one blanket per beneficiary.
- Complete the relief assistance within ten working days from the approval of funds (3 January 2003).

Proposed budget:

<i>Item</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Price (CHF)</i>	<i>Total (CHF)</i>
Blankets	5,500 pcs	8*	44'000
Transport	5 x Truck	200	1'000
Loading/offloading /Distribution	5,500 pcs	0.18	990
Monitoring/Information (NHQ/Delegation)			760
Programme Support			3'250
Total:			50'000

* With a tropical climate in Bangladesh, blanket production is not common and there are few suppliers available, with an inevitable effect on pricing. With the ongoing severe cold wave and high demand from various government agencies and NGOs, the unit price of blankets has jumped to CHF 9.2 per piece. The price of CHF 8 has been offered only to BDRCS as the blankets - which are immediately available - are manually produced by community workers in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, with support of BDRCS income generation and development programme. Based on recent experience, shipment and delivery from countries outside Bangladesh would entail a minimum three months before reaching the beneficiaries, impractical in the current circumstances.

The BDRCS/Federation logistics departments are ready to start immediately the process for procurement of the blankets.

Conclusion

January is traditionally the coldest month in Bangladesh and after experiencing the lowest ever-recorded temperatures since mid December, it is difficult to predict whether the situation will further deteriorate. Current emergency assistance provided by DREF would cover the most immediate needs of the targeted population and hopefully reduce the death toll. If the situation changes for the worse, a request for further assistance will be made, with an international appeal a possibility.

For a full description of the National Society profile, see www.ifrc.org or www.bdracs.org

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All International Federation Operations seek to adhere to the Code of Conduct and are committed to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (SPHERE Project) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

For support to or for further information concerning Federation operations in this or other countries, please access the Federation website at <http://www.ifrc.org>

For longer-term programmes, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal.

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