

# **BANGLADESH: POST CONFLICT REHABILITATION**

27 October 1998

*appeal no. 09/98*

*situation report no. 3*

*period covered: 2 June - 10 October 1998*

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*The first three-month distribution of food to families repatriated to the Chittagong Hill Tracts was carried out during the reporting period by the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society, with the support of the International Federation, while preparations were underway in September for the second distribution.*

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## ***The context***

Following the signing of a peace agreement at the end of 1997 between the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) and the PCJSS, the organisation representing the tribal people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), repatriation of the remaining 9,179 refugee families from India was concluded by February 1998. Under the terms of the agreement, all returning families received food, cash, building material and land from the GoB. In addition, they were given a three months supplementary food package by the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS).

At the request of the GoB, the BDRCS will, from funds received in response to the Appeal launched on 23 March 1998, supply supplementary food to 9,179 families for another 9 months, develop community service activities for an additional estimated 120,000 beneficiaries, and introduce disaster preparedness and health programmes benefiting a large part of the total CHT population of one million people. In addition, the BDRCS would provide a 3 month ration to 1,248 families who returned in March 1997, prior to the signing of the peace agreement.

The primary objective of this BDRCS operation is to support the fragile peace process in the Chittagong Hill Tracts which was started when the peace agreement was signed. This, and the long-term involvement of the BDRCS in the Hill Tracts (since 1994) has ensured a very positive response to the Appeal, particularly from the Diplomatic Missions in Dhaka.

## ***Latest events***

On 3 June, Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of Bangladesh, announced an ambitious plan totalling BDT 21.5 billion (CHF 717 million) for development of the CHT region. The projects will cover infrastructure development, power, road building and maintenance, radio and information, education and culture, etc. with the aim to expedite economic activity in the CHT.

On 20-21 June, the International Federation was in attendance at an international conference on "Chittagong Hill Tracts and Peace" jointly sponsored by the GoB and the UNDP. The recommendations put forward by the UNDP sponsored mission to the CHT in April were endorsed in principle by the Conference in support of the CHT peace process.

Mr. Kalpa Ranjan Chakma, Minister without Portfolio, was given the charge of the Ministry of CHT affairs by the Prime Minister on 21 July. The ministry was created by the government on 15 July with specific responsibilities to be established in the forthcoming months. In another positive move on 12 July the government announced the appointment of Mr. Sharadindu Chakma, a retired high official and president of the Tribal Buddhist Association as Bangladesh ambassador to Bhutan. He is the first CHT tribal to be nominated to an ambassadorial position.

On 25 June 1998, the GoB took the first steps in identifying "internally displaced persons" in the Hill Tracts by establishing a working definition, i.e. those persons who became displaced between 15 August 1975 (death of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman) and January 1992 (date of PCJSS cease-fire). Individual cases will have to be checked by the Headmen and other local level government authorities. Once the numbers are identified the government will establish a plan to deal with their problems, which could in turn affect the current BDRCS operation.

Despite intensive discussions, at times involving the prime minister and the PCJSS leader, the much talked about Regional Council for CHT could not be formed as the government and the PCJSS failed to arrive at a consensus as to the nomination of its members.

The BNP lead opposition continued their agitation against the CHT accord during this period. A two day 'long march' in vehicles from Dhaka to CHT on 9-10 June was the most prominent among them followed by a country wide hartal and localised blockade by some splinter groups. These actions have to date had little or no effect on the implementation of this operation.

## ***Red Cross/Red Crescent action***

### **Procurement •**

The complete delivery of the food items (125,124 kg of dal, 62,568 litres of oil and 62,568 kg of iodised salt) by the respective suppliers to the BDRCS's central warehouse in Dhaka was concluded on 21 June. These items were required for the first three month distributions to 10,427 families in two districts, Khagrachari and Rangamati. Random checks on the delivered items were conducted by the Federation Delegation at the BDRCS central warehouse in Dhaka. Those that did not meet the packing and quality requirements were rejected by the Delegation and later replaced by the suppliers concerned.

### **Distribution •**

The BDRCS tasked one of its Deputy Directors to co-ordinate the relief operations in CHT with the assistance of two Assistant Directors. The operations were overseen by senior officials of the society including the Deputy Secretary General and concerned directors of the relief department. The Federation's relief delegate was also present during the initial distributions and the acting HoD visited CHT during the undertaking of relief operations.

The distribution was carried out between 19 June to 26 July . As gathered from the BDRCS, the distribution details are as follows:

<b>Region</b>	<b>No. of Families Targeted</b>	<b>No. of Families Received</b>	<b>Absentees</b>
Khagrachari Sadar	1045	1041	4

Panchari	3281	3280	1
Matiranga	1357	1350	7
Ramgarh	1165	1164	1
Manikchari	288	285	3
Mahalchari	18	13	5
Laxmichari	6	6	nil
Baghaichari	31	31	nil
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,408</b>	<b>10,386</b>	<b>21</b>

The food rations for the absentees have been kept with the respective regional Administrators while that of a deceased returnee in Ramgarh has been brought back to the NHQ.

### **Monitoring •**

From 20-23 June, the Federation's relief delegate and liaison officer, accompanied by the Director of BDRCS Relief Department, undertook a monitoring mission to the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in connection with the ongoing first phase supplementary food distributions in Khagrachari and Dighinala Thanas. During the monitoring mission, a number of interviews with the returnees were conducted by the team. Apart from the about 35 families facing a land litigation problem, no serious concerns or complaints were heard from the returnees. The picture of the internally displaced persons remained unclear in Khagrachari with regard to the numbers of this group of people.

From 7-10 July, the Federation's disaster preparedness delegate had a second monitoring mission to the CHT relating to the same food distributions in Khagrachari District. Meetings were held with the leaders of local government, police, PCJSS and refugees/returnees.

Both the missions found that food distribution was being carried out efficiently by the BDRCS Coordination/Distribution Team. They found tele-communications between Dhaka and CHT to be very difficult.

## ***Outstanding needs***

It has been agreed between the BDRCS/Federation and the GoB to include the 1,949 demobilised PCJSS fighters and their families integrated back into society in the list of beneficiaries to receive supplementary food rations. This initiative will be implemented when the required funding is secured. As the internally displaced persons are more clearly defined now, it is estimated that there are 20-30,000 families in the CHT in a similar situation. The rehabilitation of the 'internal refugees' is covered by the CHT Peace Agreement which implies enhanced coverage by food relief in the near future.

Funding for implementation of the Branch institutional development and community development programmes as outlined in the appeal for an estimated 120,000 beneficiaries in the CHT region is still needed.

## ***External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media***

The BDRCS/Federation is maintaining close contact with governmental authorities, UN agencies, foreign missions/embassies and other organisations in Bangladesh regarding the implementation of the operation, which has been very positively regarded. The Federation was invited to participate in major

policy discussions at the recent government-sponsored International Peace Conference . Red Crescent relief operations have been covered in the local press as well as international media, such as the BBC.

## ***Contributions***

See Annex 1 for details.

## ***Conclusion***

The GoB's endorsement in June of the recommendations from the UNDP sponsored mission to the CHT in April has paved the way for some key donors to support the BDRCS/Federation operation in the CHT region. The ongoing peace process in the Hill Tracts still remains vulnerable, a successful implementation of the planned distribution of supplementary food for the returnees will certainly make a difference in this regard. The inclusion of the members of the defunct armed wing (Shanti Bahini) and internally displaced persons as food relief beneficiaries will require additional funding in the future.

To achieve the full objectives of the Plan of Action, the Federation would like to renew its appeal to donors to give their full support to this operation in the CHT region.

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