

SOUTH ASIA : Building Capacities

9 May, 2000

appeal no. 01.54/2000

situation report no. 1

period covered: 1 January - 31 March

Regional initiatives included the holding of a South Asia donor participation meeting and the first ever regional recruitment meeting. Potential emergency situations in several countries, including a spreading drought, are being monitored. National disaster preparedness and health programmes were promoted, as were information services. Training in financial systems continued. The Sri Lanka office has been reinforced and the Pakistan office is now up to full strength.

The context

Developments in the political situation in several countries in the region may have an impact on the work of the Federation and the National Societies in the region.

The decision by the new Pakistan Government to move Afghanistan refugees out of cities such as Islamabad and back to their original refugee camps has made many of them more vulnerable and less self-supportive and this may well result in additional calls on Red Cross/Red Crescent services. The situation is being followed by the Pakistan Red Crescent and the Federation.

In Sri Lanka, the conflict in the North and East continues, with heavy casualties on both sides. The country's capital, Colombo, has also been the target of rebel groups, where on several occasions suicide bombers have caused a number of civilian casualties. The governing party, the Peoples Alliance and the main opposition party, the United National Party, began a series of discussions, starting on 9 March 2000, and centring on bringing about a peaceful solution to the conflict by way of constitutional reforms.

In Nepal, attacks by Maoist groups continue. At present the ICRC is completing a full review of this situation, but already has a strong presence in the country. The Federation will continue to follow the situation.

On the disaster front, the rehabilitation phase of the Orissa Cyclone programme is now well under way.

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On the disaster front, the rehabilitation phase of the Orissa Cyclone programme is now well under way.

The Regional Delegation has just completed a first assessment of a potentially serious drought situation in Balochistan, the western province of Pakistan; the Federation has already issued a request for assistance for a small food operation and the funds to carry out a more detailed assessment. A full appeal will not be issued until a comprehensive assessment has been made. This will cover a much greater geographical area, certainly extending into Afghanistan, which is already being affected, and the western states of India, which are being assessed through the branches of the Indian Red Cross.

The Sri Lanka office has reported an unusual weather pattern, with the onset of rains in early March. Although this is not yet causing any disruption to agriculture, the situation is being monitored.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Regional Initiatives •

The Regional Delegation made several presentations during regular scheduled visits to all the key donors and organisations in Delhi, and during visits to Islamabad, Colombo and Kathmandu. One important presentation was provided by the Federation to staff and senior officers in the US and Canadian Embassies in Delhi. The Delegation is at present conducting a comprehensive review and update on the sectoral and geographical (state wide) interests of all of the major potential donor organisations and representatives in India, which will be available shortly.

Another major activity during this quarter was the organisation of the first South Asia donor participation meeting for two years. This took place in Kathmandu in late March. Presentations by the National Societies of Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka Federation Delegation/Secretariat and ICRC were followed by a working group session analysing the forward plan of each Society and making suggestions for further development. The Representatives of the South Asian Societies included senior staff -- Secretary General (in all cases) and Chairman (Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan). The Regional Federation Heads of Delegation for Afghanistan and Bangladesh also attended, along with ICRC representatives from the Delhi regional office, the Sri Lanka country delegation and Pakistan country delegation. Ten donor National Societies were represented as well as four Secretariat staff.

Additional funding has already been realised as a direct result of this meeting, including Norwegian Red Cross funding of the health and hygiene shanty town pilot programme in India.

One focal point of attention was the newly signed working agreement between the ICRC, Federation and the National Society in Pakistan, which gives guidelines for co-operation by all parts of the Movement in the country and establishes a new unit in the Pakistan Red Crescent (PRCS). This unit, jointly funded by the Federation and the ICRC, is responsible for co-ordinating and developing the links between the three parts of the Movement to the benefit of PRCS. This process has now been discussed with the Indian and Nepal Red Cross Societies and the ICRC Head of Regional Delegation in Delhi and it has been agreed that a similar process can be considered for these countries. Such an agreement already exists in Sri Lanka.

This meeting was followed by the first ever South Asia regional recruitment meeting conducted by the Geneva Secretariat. This included participants from the Regional Delegation, (who will now be co-ordinating this process), and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies of Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and, as a guest, DPR Korea.

Disaster Preparedness

In India the state level disaster preparedness and disaster management programme is at a critical stage because the National Society has now taken over the role of facilitator from the Federation. While

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strongly supportive of the programme, the Indian Red Cross rightly considers that the process should be more targeted at the most disaster prone States.

The Regional Delegation has now carried out a full review of these programmes. Its key recommendations for the future have been presented to the Indian Red Cross and will be discussed as part of the disaster preparedness programme following the Orissa cyclone.

The provincial programme for Disaster Preparedness development in Pakistan has now been completed. The new regional institutional development delegate was to visit the Pakistan Red Crescent in order to review the next, community based, stages of this programme. Again this programme is at a critical stage as the Federation is now looking to the National Society to take over its control and management.

In Nepal and Sri Lanka the country programmes are also on target, but again the whole programme will be fully reviewed by the new delegate.

Health

Within the country strategies and regional assistance strategies for each country there is a great deal of emphasis on health programmes. The new regional health delegate is prioritising the ongoing health strategy and has already discussed many of these programmes with the relevant National Society. One main item of concern is the future development of the blood service and safe blood issues. This was the core message of the joint WHO / Federation press launch on World Health Day conducted in Delhi, and will be further developed during the next regional Secretary Generals Meeting, to be held in Bangladesh in May.

Finance Development

In January, the Regional Finance Delegate along with Principal Accounts Officer and the Finance Manager visited Pakistan to hold a finance training workshop. The training concentrated on technical accounting, budgeting and reporting, and was attended by the finance personnel from the NHQ and the provinces.

In February, the Regional Finance Delegate visited Sri Lanka; principally to work with the finance department of the National Society in order to prepare a proposal for the computerisation of the NHQ accounting function. Additionally, the delegate worked with the Sri Lanka delegation on administrative and financial matters.

Requests from the Bangladesh Red Crescent, from the Federation Head of Delegation in Afghanistan, and from the Indian Red Cross for help in the development of their finance departments are now being actioned by the delegate.

In the next quarter, the regional finance delegate will visit Pakistan to work with the Principal Accounts Officer on reviewing the finance development programme and planning the next stage in the programme. Refresher training is planned for the Nepal Red Cross in the recently installed upgraded version of SCALA, and in the report writing software.

While in Bangladesh for the Secretary Generals meeting; the delegate will also work with the newly appointed Finance Delegate to review the finance development work with the BDRCS.

Regional Information Programme

During the first quarter the regional information delegate carried out a number of activities linked to capacity building of the information departments of National Societies in the South Asia region. As part of this process, field missions have been undertaken to Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

In Sri Lanka, the information delegate discussed the creation of an information unit at the National Society's headquarters with senior management in the Sri Lanka Red Cross (SLRCS) headquarters and branches. Guidelines for a long term communications strategy have been drafted -- aimed at raising the profile of the Red Cross throughout the country. The regional office will continue to assist the SLRCS

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in this process by providing guidance on establishing internal and external information systems and other general communications activities. The Delegation is also part-funding a newly recruited information officer in SLRCS who will receive training in the second quarter from the regional information delegate as part of her induction.

The regional information delegate visited Bangladesh for meetings with members of the Federation delegation and the Bangladesh Red Crescent (BDRCS). Discussions with the Federation centred around the development of the BDRCS information unit, the production of a standardised publication for the delegation, the establishment of a regional photo-archive and the need for improved information sharing with the regional office.

The regional information delegate also met with senior management and information personnel of the BDRCS. Assistance is being provided to produce a long term communications strategy for the BDRCS and a joint plan of action is being devised by the Federation and the ICRC regional office to streamline areas of co-operation with the BDRCS information department.

In March, the regional information delegate carried out a field mission to Balochistan in south-west Pakistan, to carry out a needs assessment of the drought affected areas.

Information support continues to be provided to the Federation delegation in Orissa and work has begun on the production of an 'Insight' publication that will focus upon the Red Cross response to the Orissa cyclone and the ongoing rehabilitation programme and disaster preparedness initiatives in the region. A press trip is scheduled to take place at the end of April, six months after the disaster, for journalists from leading Indian newspapers.

The regional information office has recently been strengthened following the recruitment of an additional information officer whose primary role initially will be to oversee the production of the Orissa 'Insight', and to continue developing a regional information network between the Federation and the National Societies in the region.

Sri Lanka Office

The Sri Lanka Red Cross Society (SLRCS) has been in regular contact with the South Asia Regional Delegation as well as the Office Manager in Colombo. All the DFID funded projects for 1999 were completed and reported on in March 2000.

The Secretary General and Director of Development of SLRCS attended the Partnership Meeting held in Kathmandu in March and the Director Administration and Senior Vice President attended the Regional Recruitment Workshop also held in Kathmandu in March.

Three Federation employees, the Office Manager, the Office Assistant and a Driver continued in employment. Their contracts were renewed for one year from January 2000. The Office Manager attended the Regional Recruitment Workshop in Kathmandu in March. Support will be strengthened considerably with the arrival of the newly appointed regional Institutional Delegate/ Federation country representative, to be based in Colombo.

Pakistan Office

The Canadian Government funding of the Community Based First Aid training programme was approved and the first instalment transferred via the Federation to the Pakistan Red Crescent, (PRCS). The Training Centre is now operational.

The Regional Head of Delegation and Regional Programme Manager visited Islamabad 11 - 15 February to attend the Annual Planning Meeting of the PRCS and the launching of its Development and Co-operation Unit. Meetings were held with the ICRC to finalise the working document for co-operation between PRCS, the Federation and the ICRC.

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When the new Regional Health Delegate arrives, to be based in Islamabad there will be a full Federation presence after a gap of over one year.

Regional Administration

The Regional Commercial Manager was in Orissa for two weeks in January, to provide help with logistics and help collect relevant documentation for the relief phase. He also accompanied the Head of Delegation to Pakistan for meetings with ICRC and PRCS.

A Bangladesh Red Crescent staff member joined the delegation as Staff on Loan (6 months). He will work on developing a database for Disaster Preparedness in the region. His input to the delegation will be particularly valuable since it is still in the process of recruiting a disaster preparedness delegate. Both these positions are funded by the German Red Cross.

The regional administration officer has drafted a handbook for the administration unit, intended to develop systems in the unit and also act as induction material for all new members of the delegation.

Orissa cyclone

Immediately after the Indian Red Cross emergency relief operation (phase 1), a joint Indian Red Cross /Federation relief operation (phase 2) for 250,000 beneficiaries started. This operation ended, as scheduled, on 31 January 2000. On 1 February the Orissa State branch assisted by the International Federation embarked on a six month rehabilitation programme (phase 3).

Major planning efforts are now being put into the development of a disaster preparedness plan and associated training. The Indian Red Cross would like these plans cover a wider geographical area than Orissa itself, and a joint programme with Andhra Pradesh, the adjacent coastal state, is already being considered by the Federation.

This operation has been the largest Red Cross relief operation in India for many years. The total Federation assisted programme now stands at CHF 7.2 million.

Other Developments •

ICRC Relations

Federation/ICRC relations are very strong and positive. The experience in Pakistan of producing a set of guidelines for the Pakistan Red Crescent joint assistance has been a very positive move, as has the setting up of a jointly funded development and co-operation unit in Islamabad, and a series of planning meetings attended by all three parts of the Movement, but chaired by the Secretary General of the National Society. It has been agreed that a similar exercise will be considered for India and Nepal. A joint ICRC / Federation / National Society meeting will be held in Delhi in early April.

Regional Staff

As a result of the decision by the Federation Secretariat to make Delhi one of the core regional delegations, and the significant increase in core programme and relief funding, the Regional Delegation is now a much stronger unit than two years ago. In total, there are now five senior delegates, shortly to be six with the introduction of a regional disaster preparedness delegate. In addition the office in Delhi has 16 South Asian staff (including two staff from the Nepal Red Cross and one from the Bangladesh Red Crescent). The Sri Lanka office and the Pakistan Office have three local staff each, besides the new out-posted regional delegates, and there are three Federation staff in Orissa.

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Outstanding needs

Further funding is urgently needed for the regional delegation, particularly for Federation assistance in Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka, although the interest in funding South Asia operations has increased considerably, particularly as a result of the recent participation meeting in Kathmandu.

The delegation now has a very strong team that needs additional programme funding to fully realise its potential in this very large and highly vulnerable part of the world.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The Federation has increased relations with all Delhi-based media. There was a very good response to the Federation input to World Health Day, which included articles in national and local newspapers, and TV coverage. The relationship has also led to a much greater interest in the Red Cross / Crescent by the broadcast media.. In addition, Reuters have funded one of the new schools being built as part of the Orissa cyclone rehabilitation programme.

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