

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

SOUTH ASIA: MONSOON FLOODING AND LANDSLIDES

25 July 2002

Information Bulletin N° 1

This Bulletin is for information only and follows a series of recent reports on Bangladesh, India, and Nepal issued by the Federation (shown at <http://www.ifrc.org>). The Federation urgently seeks funds to replenish the relief stocks of the three National Societies in order to meet the immediate needs of the victims. Contributions should be made in relation to the Federation's Appeals 01.26/2002 (Bangladesh), 20/2001 (India), and 01.27.2002 (Nepal).

The Situation

During the past few days the onset of the monsoon in the South Asian region has intensified causing widespread flooding in northeastern India, Nepal and Bangladesh. Flooding in Bangladesh and Nepal has been accompanied by severe landslides and river erosion. This latest increase in flooding has further aggravated the suffering of the millions of people affected by this years monsoon. Heavy rainfalls are forecast throughout the region for the next five days. An additional matter of concern is the exceptionally high snow pack and glacial melt-rate being observed in the Himalayas which is adding to the already swollen river volume.

Bangladesh

As reported in the Information Bulletin issued on 18 July 2002, many rivers in Bangladesh continue to rise. Incessant rain water coupled with torrents of water run-off from the hills across the Indian border, have inundated many areas worsening the overall flood situation and rendering many people homeless. Road links have also been disrupted in the country. The high tides being experienced in the Bay of Bengal are posing an additional threat to the flooding situation at this time.

Surging waters of the Brahmaputra and Meghna Rivers engulfed new regions in the farming hinterlands in central and northern Bangladesh after two major rivers have rose alarmingly overnight following the onrush of torrent from across the frontiers. The northeastern Sylhet region, bordering on the Indian state of Assam experienced incessant showers inducing hundreds of farming families to abandon their fragile straw huts and move to higher ground. The flash floods have also affected hundreds of thousands of people in the south-western, northern, northeastern and southeastern districts of Bangladesh causing massive losses to standing crops, vegetable and seedbeds, as well as damaging road communication and other local infrastructure.

The Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC) reports that, except South Eastern Hill Basin, most of the rivers in the Brahmaputra, Ganges and Meghna basins are likely to register further rises during the next 48 hours. According to the Bangladesh Flood Information Centre current water levels are considered to be normal flooding levels for this time of year.

With rapid changes in the flood situation in neighbouring Indian states and recent flooding and landslides in Nepal, the situation in Bangladesh could become drastic in the space of 24 hours as flood waters from neighbouring

countries flow into Bangladesh and have the potential to create a serious humanitarian emergency throughout the country.

Meetings have been organised by the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MDMR) in order to assess the flood damage across the country. MDMR has approved initial relief of 630 metric tones of rice, small housing loans and clothing for the destitute families of the 13 flood affected, waterlogged and river eroded districts.

Limited scale relief operations are being carried out though out the country by various IOs/NGOs providing mainly emergency food relief to the most vulnerable population in the most affected districts. Members of the Disaster Emergency Group continue to co-ordinate their actions in order to avoid duplication of relief distribution.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The Bangladesh Red Crescent (BDRCS) and Federation continue to closely monitor the situation through regular contact with BDRCS branches in the field, share information and co-ordinate with the Disaster Emergency Group members (UN, government, IO/NGOs and others).

Acting on assessment reports and consequent requests for assistance from its field Units, BDRCS is presently organising the distribution of the following emergency food relief items: 140 metric tones of rice, 600 family kits and high protein biscuits recently donated by the Norwegian Red Cross. The distribution will take place in the north, northeastern and southeastern districts of: Noakhali, Kurigram, Jamalpur, Siraghanj, Rangpur, Surnamganj and three districts of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). The total number of beneficiaries to be assisted is 7,000 families or approx. 35,000 beneficiaries. The first distribution is planned for tomorrow (26 July 2002) in the CHT and it will be carried out by BDRCS Community Based Disaster Preparedness (CBDP) squads and RCY volunteers.

As reported in the last Information Bulletin the next seven weeks will be critical in Bangladesh as the situation could change overnight with extensive monsoon rainfall in the region (in and around Bangladesh).

India

While the north-western states of India are experiencing the worst drought in twelve years, states in the North and East of the country, particularly Assam, Bihar, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Arunachal Pradesh continue to reel under intense flooding. Latest media reports indicate that millions could be affected. The Indian Meteorological Department has issued continued heavy rain warnings for many of the affected states, suggesting the situation may become worse in the coming weeks.

Assam and Bihar continue to be the most seriously affected states, with authorities reporting some two million persons affected in these states alone. Flood water from Nepal entering into both Bihar and Assam is anticipating that the situation will worsen by the day.

Assam: Over one million persons and 1,777 villages are reported by government officials and the Indian Red Cross Society (IRCS) as being affected in Assam. The government estimates that 1.15 million hectares of land has been submerged due to flooding and that 25,000 hectares of farmland has been destroyed. Six people have been killed in the last 15 days due to surging river levels and sweeping currents. Dhemaji district has been the worst hit and has been cut off from the rest of the country for the past three weeks due to damaged road and rail links. Water levels in some parts of this district are reportedly reaching the roof line of houses.

The District Magistrate of Assam has asked the IRCS for assistance in providing medical supplies and support, and has also requested that the IRCS provide water purification tablets and tarpaulins to the affected districts. Relief camps have been set up by the state government and it is expected that affected people will stay in these camps for at least 2-3 months. Federal troops were brought into Assam this week and charged with the task of rescuing the thousands of people marooned by the rising waters and with food distribution to the displaced and affected populations. Government officials have reported a decrease in food supplies since flood waters have swept away roads and bridges. A shortage of clean drinking water has also been reported in some districts.

Bihar: A further three rivers broke through their embankments on July 24th exacerbating the already serious flooding situation in Bihar even further. The Chief Minister of Bihar has declared the situation serious and has ordered authorities to carry relief supplies "on a war footing". Nearly half a million people have been affected by floods in

Bihar and twenty people have lost their lives as a result of the flooding. Federal troops have arrived in Bihar and are operating boat rescue services and arranging for food distribution.

Red Cross and Red Crescent Action

The IRCS's Assam State Branch volunteers have been mobilized to assist the local administration in the evacuation of flood affected people to safer places. Volunteers are also involved in an ongoing needs assessment survey which is being used by the state and national headquarters of the IRCS to monitor the needs of the population. The Assam state branch has on-hand 10,000 family relief kits which are being distributed along with tarpaulins, mosquito nets and woollen blankets where needed.

In Bihar, IRCS local district and sub-district branches in flood affected districts continue to monitor the situation. Volunteers are assisting the local administration with the transport of affected persons and are distributing emergency relief items. The IRCS National Headquarters has provided its Bihar branch with 15 boats which are being used in the transportation of people and relief supplies.

The Eastern and North Eastern states of India have experienced several floods in the past ten years, as a result, state and district branches of the IRCS have focussed on building their capacity in community based disaster preparedness and disaster mitigation initiatives.

The IRCS headquarters continues to maintain daily contact with all flood affected areas and with the concerned government authorities, continuously monitoring the situation. Relief assistance decisions are based on field assessments being carried out by volunteers. Past IRCS experience in flood situations indicate that approximately 35,000 family relief packages (for approximately 150,000 people) will be needed in the two worst hit states. If the situation continues to worsen, the combined relief stocks in the three regional warehouses in Delhi, Kolkata and Gawahati will not be sufficient to meet the needs of the affected populations.

The IRCS and the Federation remain on high alert and continue to meet regularly to ensure effective co-ordination of assessment and relief activities. ECHO's technical assistant for India and Nepal contacted the Federation's South Asia Regional Delegation today requesting an update on the situation in both countries.

Nepal

Although the monsoon season in Nepal started with a slight delay, the massive downpour triggered by heavy monsoon rains on 21 July continuing through 23-24 July turned into the highest recorded rainfall in the capital of Nepal in three decades, according to the department of Hydrology and Meteorology (DOHM). The four days of heavy rain coupled with massive landslides, flash floods and poor drainage caused a number of deaths and saw significant damage to property. Infrastructures in many districts of eastern, central and western Nepal has also been severely damaged.

According to unofficial sources thousands of people are affected by the floods, with more than 100 deaths, several hundred injuries reported. Many people have been made homeless as their houses have been washed away by flood waters. Roads and highways in many parts of the country has also been damaged or wiped out. The highway that links the Kathmandu valley with other parts of the country such as Prithivi, Tribhuvan and Arainko has been severely damaged in several places ensuring that transport by road into and out of the area is impossible. Damages to some water supply systems in the Kathmandu valley have also been reported.

Although lighter rains are forecast for the remainder of July, intermittent heavy downpours are expected, according to the Weather Forecasting Division (WFD). WFD also said, the monsoon has slowed down during the past 24 hours indicating that there will be an improvement in weather conditions in the coming week..

The Ministry of Home Affairs mobilised army and police personnel for rescue operations dispatched rescue teams to areas affected by floods and landslides as soon as was possible. The Ministry of Roads and Transport has undertaken necessary steps in mobilising manpower to clear the highways. The government, and local IO/NGOs are in the process of assessing the damages in different parts of the country. Some NGOs have been collecting and distributing small quantities of relief and food materials for distribution among the most affected population. Due to general

communication difficulties further aggravated by the latest events, it is expected to take some time before the actual results of assessments of damages and needs are made available.

Red Cross and Red Crescent Action

As immediate response to the flooding and landslide in the country, the Nepal Red Cross established effective co-ordination with the Federations regional delegation, the ICRC, sister national societies, IO/NGOs, the Ministry of Home Affairs and the most affected district chapters/units in the country (wherever possible). NRCS is also an active member of the Disaster Management Committee chaired by the Ministry of Home Affairs at central level in Kathmandu, as well as member of "Disaster Preparedness Network"(DP-Net).

The Nepal Red Cross Society reacted rapidly by mobilising its volunteers to carry out field surveys in different chapters/units of the country. Using their own stocks and resources NRCS volunteers are carrying out distribution of limited relief materials to the most vulnerable victims of floods and landslides. More distributions are underway in the eastern, central and western parts of Nepal through its regional level warehouses, where the NRCS is preparing to dispatch more relief materials from its emergency relief stocks to the most affected district chapters. A further distribution of 1,500 family relief packages is to be organised from the central level warehouse in the coming days. In total, 3,219 family packages of relief materials have been dispatched to NRCS district branches for distribution.

At the present time, many district chapters/units are undergoing field assessments in their respective areas. 3,640 family packages of relief materials are kept on standby in the central warehouse in Kathmandu awaiting reports from the field. It may take some days to receive the detailed reports (casualties, damages and needs) in the national headquarters from different parts of the country. As mentioned earlier, due to lack of communication and transportation (accessibility) facilities, NRCS was not able to receive up-to-date information from the disaster affected areas on a regular basis.

The ICRC cooperation delegate is in regular contact and is working closely with the NRCS and the ICRC Head of Delegation in Nepal and the Federation's Head of regional Delegation in New Delhi are keeping in close contact.

Contingency Planng

There are currently a minimum of 25 Federation/Bilateral Delegates and national staff in these three countries with considerable relief experience. The region has one FACT team leader and a number of delegates and national staff who have received FACT or ERU training. A contingency plan has been devised for the deployment of these specialists if and when necessary.

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

For further details please contact:

- *Tatjana Tasic, South Asia Desk in Geneva, Phone: +41 22 730 4429; e-mail:tosic@ifrc.org*
- *Suzana Jekic, South Asia Desk in Geneva, Phone: +41 22 730 4353; e-mail:jekic@ifrc.org*

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.

John Horekens
Director
External Relations Division

Simon Missiri
Head
Asia and Pacific Department