



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

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The Federation urgently seeks funds to replenish the relief stocks of the three National Societies in order to meet immediate needs of the victims. Contributions should be made in relation to the Federation's Appeals 01.26/2002 (Bangladesh), 20/2002 (India), and 01.027/2002 (Nepal).

The Situation

Since Information Bulletin No.1 was published, the South Asian region continues to be affected by the ongoing and very active monsoon season. While the rainfall has decreased in some areas, rainfall in other areas has simultaneously been heavy, increasing the water levels of the major rivers and further worsening the overall flood situation. Widespread flooding and landslides in the northeastern Indian states of Assam and Bihar, and in Bangladesh and Nepal continues to aggravate the suffering of millions of people affected by this year's monsoon. Continuing heavy to moderate rainfalls are forecast throughout the region for the coming days.

Bangladesh

Major rivers in the upstream have recorded further fall marking a gradual improvement in the overall flood situation but swelling up rivers worsens the situation around the capital city of Dhaka.

According to Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB), gradual rise in the water levels of the rivers Shitalakhya, Turag and Tongi canal had already contributed to further inundation of low lying areas around Dhaka city, Narayanganj and other adjoining areas. River Shitalakhya continues to rise above danger level further deteriorating the flood situation.

The Brahmaputra right embankment at Sariakandi point has been threatened due to a surge of flood water. Local officials and the general population in the area have been alerted. Water levels in the Ganges River is also increasing at a rapid rate. The combined flow of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra may cause a further deterioration of the flood situation in the districts of Rajbari, Munshinganj, Madaripur, Shariatpur and Dhaka.

The flood situation over the upper portion of the Meghna basin is expected to continue to improve. However, in the lower portion of the basin the Meghna at Bhairab Bazar continues to flow above the danger level with a rising trend.



The flood situation in the districts of Kishoreganj, Narsingdi and Brahmanbaria is expected to deteriorate further according to the Flood Forecasting and Warning Center (FFWC). The FFWC also reports that on 25th July, the Lakhya River at Naraynganj also crossed the danger level. Further increase is expected in which case more low-lying areas of the district would become inundated.

According to BWDB this year's floods have damaged 655 km of embankments (at 160 points), 107 km of flood protection works and 66 different infrastructures under various projects. A major portion of the Rangpur-Dhaka highway in Ghaibanda district was washed away. Road and railway communications remain cut in many areas.

In response to the flood situation, the government has allocated limited relief goods along with cash assistance to the flood victims in the 15 most affected districts. The Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief has instructed all concerned officials in the flood affected districts to remain alert to ensure that no one goes without food due to flood situation.

The threat of serious flooding and a humanitarian emergency throughout the country remains as the overall flood situation will remain critical for the next six weeks.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The BDRCS and the Federation delegation continue to maintain close contacts with all BDRCS district branches in the flood affected districts.

Regular co-ordination meetings of the Disaster Emergency Response (DER) group, which is chaired by the WFP and government representatives (Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief), are attended by both BDRCS and Federation representatives in order to share information and coordinate the small relief operations being carried out by various stakeholders in the country. Given the continued flooding in some areas and the onset of rain in eastern India and the Himalayas, the DER group met on 29th July. At the meeting it was decided to activate the DER "Control Cell" (at the WFP office, linked to Disaster Management Bureau - DMB) and to form and dispatch three separate assessment teams; one each, to the northwest, northeast and south of the country (along the major rivers). BDRCS, as a full member of DER group, will provide a representative for each of the assessment teams.

Since the last report was issued, the BDRCS has successfully completed the distribution of 600 family kits and high protein biscuits in the three districts of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The BDRCS chairman, Secretary General and the Federation Head of Delegation were present during the distribution. Since the beginning of the monsoon season, more than 12,000 beneficiaries have been assisted by the BDRCS through distribution of various relief goods.

On the request of its four district units, BDRCS national headquarters has allocated 1,100 family kits and 162 cartons of high protein biscuits for distribution to most affected population (approx. 6,000 beneficiaries) in the four districts of : Bogra, Sirajgong, Jamalpur and Ghaibanda (15 people died due to floods in these four districts). All four districts are located in central and eastern parts of Bangladesh along Brahmaputra-Jamuna basin affected by recent onrush of downstream water.

The distribution is organized for 2nd august. Meanwhile, according to the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between the BDRCS/Federation, WFP and the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MDMR) for allocation of 1,000 MT of food/per year for emergency food relief assistance, BDRCS is still awaiting approval from the MDMR for the release of 140 mt of food to be distributed in the 12 most affected districts. BDRCS medical teams are also on stand by.

The Federation Delegation is maintaining close contact with major donor agencies in Bangladesh. A coordination meeting was recently held in Dhaka with an ECHO representative and an action plan was discussed in the event of ECHO's assistance being required.

The Federation Head of Delegation and the BDRCSs chairman are currently visiting affected areas in the central and northwestern parts of Bangladesh.

India

The flood situation in Assam and Bihar has further worsened in the past few days. More areas have been inundated by the flash waters and the combined death toll in the two states has risen to 122. The latest report from the National Disaster Management division indicates that over 15 million people have been affected. The flood has also caused havoc in certain districts in Uttar Pradesh in addition to Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Tripura and West Bengal.

Assam: Since mid June the state has experienced more than four consecutive flash floods. Flood water and frequent change of river course has led to severe soil erosion and silting. Over 130 breaches on various embankment have affected 19 districts till date inundating 5,361 villages, damaging 5,252 houses and 323,000 hectares of cropland. Currently, over 80,000 families are seeking shelter in some 300 relief camps in the state. The government has distributed Rs 19 million (CHF 630,000) worth of food items with the support of local NGOs. Relief efforts have however been impeded due to disrupted road communication to most districts.

Media reports and UNDP source indicate at least 76 death cases susceptible to encephalitis and few cases of starvation in the affected areas. The problem, though not necessarily related to the floods, has deepened the crisis of medicine shortage. Most districts are now showing a receding trend in water level and the flood situation has improved in upper state districts. The Brahmaputra and its numerous tributaries however continue to flow above the danger level in the districts of Kamrup, Dhubri, Goalpara and Karimganj. The state government has stated that water stagnation in some districts may be a major problem over the following months and unavailability of safe drinking water and medical personnel will be the biggest challenge.

Dhemaji district has remained the worst hit district as it has been cut off from the rest of the country for over a month now. Relief distribution has been going on. Twenty-nine health centres have been established. Halogen tablets and 50 tube wells are being provided to the affected villages by the local authorities. The district administration has requested external assistance to provide tarpaulins, polythene, tents, water purification, ORS (Oral Rehydration Salts) besides bottles of saline for medical relief in the camps, safe drinking water for 25 million people and mobile medical team of doctors and paramedical staff. There is currently modest level of local NGO response and no INGO action apart from that of CASA and Oxfam through their local networks.

Bihar: In Bihar where ironically some parts are suffering from drought, a new wave of flash floods over the past few days, following release of water in river Gandak from Nepal, has breached away the embankments of Bagmati Mahananda, Kosi and Kamla Balan completely inundating northern Bihar and raising the death toll to 98 according to the latest official figures. Some 5,320 villages in 17 districts and have been affected where 32,480 houses and 450,000 hectares of cropland have been destroyed affecting over 10 million people. The local authorities have activated 246 relief camps and 220 health centres and have allocated Rs 160 million (CHF 5.3 million) for relief operations. Wheat, ready made food, matchboxes, candles, oil and polythene sheets have been distributed to the affected population. Army boats have also been mobilized for the rescue operation and army helicopters dispatched to drop a total of 24,502 food packets to road disrupted districts. The state government has stated that they are facing difficulty in carrying out relief operations following snapping of road links in the affected districts and as the current spate of flood is unprecedented in the state, the situation has beyond their capacity to cope with.

Except ongoing relief operation by the India Red Cross and Oxfam which has started assessment in Madhubani district, very few NGOs have started working in the affected areas. The state government is seeking more funds and manpower to step up relief and rescue operations. The flood situation could deteriorate if the water starting from Nepal inundates the northern Bihar which would subsequently cause further flooding in the southern part of the state.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The Indian Red Cross Society (IRCS) National Headquarters regional representative stationed in Guwahati has been working closely with the Assam state branch to review the situation of the affected areas as assessed earlier by the local team. A further assessment is being conducted in Dhemaji district. In response to the immediate unmet needs which go also in line with those viewed by the local authority, the branch has asked for financial support of Rs 2.2 million (CHF 73,000) from the national headquarters. The branch has made a distribution plan targeting 12 of the 19 affected districts which have been inundated for a longer time. Respective district authorities have been asked to provide list of beneficiaries according to the categories of vulnerability stipulated by the branch. Distribution of 1,350 tarpaulins from the state and national headquarters stocks to Kamrup district is underway. The district

commissioner of Dhemaji has agreed to support the transportation of relief items by boat to the affected villages in Dhemaji where Red Cross relief distribution is yet to start.

On 31 July, two IRCS disaster preparedness/response officers from the national headquarters and the Federation disaster preparedness delegate were assigned to assist the branch in conducting further assessment of the affected areas in Assam. The team visited the north Guwahati Circle where five villages were inundated due to the breach of river embankment on 27 July. The main road and bridge have been disrupted. Some 150 families are living in makeshift shelters of plastic sheeting under scanty conditions. Meetings have been held with the Assam branch, the state relief commissioner and minister of health to review the situation. The joint assessment team will be visiting the other part of Kamrup and other seriously affected districts including Goalpara, Dhubri and Marigaon and is planning to meet with other aid agencies before returning to Delhi on 7 August. According to the information received so far from the field, other agencies and media reports, the situation is worrying and demands early responses as more successive waves are yet to come.

Meanwhile in response to the recent havoc of flood water, the local IRCS branches in Bihar have deployed 60 boats and have established a water purification unit in west Champaran district. Around 5,000 Red Cross volunteers are assisting the local administration in the relief and rescue operation. The Bihar state branch (BSB) has launched an appeal to seek more local funding in support of their relief operation. While an assessment is being conducted in the affected areas by the local team, a request for relief supplies has been made to the headquarters. In view of the severity of the flood situation, the IRCS national headquarters is releasing to the state branch 5,000 tarpaulins, 50 rolls of polythene sheet, 2 MT of emergency ration and 2,000 assorted clothes from the warehouses in Delhi and Kolkata to cope with the immediate needs. Another IRCS/Federation team will be sent in the coming days to Bihar to support the assessment works in the affected areas.

Nepal

Almost a week after heavy monsoon rains caused flash floods and landslides inflicting heavy damage to life and properties in Nepal, more than 27 districts (eastern and central Nepal) out of 75, remain severely affected. Many of the highways blocked by the landslides are yet to become fully operational. According to the government sources, the death toll now totals more than 240 in different parts of the country since 21st July. The toll is expected to rise further as more details become available from remote areas.

During the last two days heavy torrential rains caused further landslides in the districts of Tetrathum, Bhojpur and Kavre killing more than nine people with more than a dozen others still missing. Rescue teams consisting of army, police and Nepal Red Cross district branch volunteers are yet to reach the landslide affected area.

According to initial reports coming in from District branches of the Nepal Red Cross more than 18,309 families have been affected in eastern and central Nepal, where over 7,500 houses have been swept away and thousands of hectares of cultivated cropland has been damaged. All key highways (Mahendra, Tribhuvan, Prithvi and Araniko), that link districts to Katmandu, remained blocked by massive landslides and floods. The Ministry of Roads and Transport continues to work on clearing the debris from highways. It is expected that all highways will reopen within the next five days providing the weather situation improves. Damage to some water supply systems in the Katmandu valley have also been reported.

In the central region of Nepal the government has set up a liaison office in order to coordinate rescue and relief operations in the area. It has also established an emergency hotline inviting the public to make contributions to provide relief assistance to those affected by floods and landslides.

According to government sources, the overflowing rivers have begun to recede in parts of the hardest hit central and eastern areas of Nepal, but the Himalayan Kingdom is facing the threat of an outbreak of water borne diseases as floodwaters have led to the contamination of drinking water.

As the monsoon season has only just begun, further aggravation of human suffering including damage to infrastructure, agricultural and private properties is to be expected if heavy rainfall continues.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The NRCS continues to be very active through its grassroots network all over the country (i.e. a network of 75 district chapters, 3,282 subchapters and cooperation committees and 3,282 Youth/Junior Red Cross circles) which have been fully mobilised for current disaster response activities. In addition, the NRCS continues to maintain close contacts, share information and coordinate its efforts with the Federation, ICRC, sister national societies, GOs/IO/NGOs and the government.

The Nepal Red Cross has provided First Aid services, Search and Rescue, evacuation of affected families, and has distributed more than 10,000 kg of food items, 3,500 family packages (consisting of a blanket, tarpaulin, kitchen utensils, and a ladies saree), and other relief items. The value of distributed family packages is approx. CHF 87,000. So far, the NRCS has assisted a total of 12,546 persons.

In the 34 affected districts, the NRCS district chapters reacted rapidly to the flood situation sending assessment teams with whatever available relief materials were in stock. In coordination with the Ministry of Home affairs, NRCS national headquarters sent 50 family packages of relief materials into the Khotang district immediately after a major landslide. Likewise, other district chapters have been mobilizing their respective subchapters, including Youth/Junior Red Cross Circles, Red Cross volunteers and staff, for initial assessments, "search and rescue", relief assistance, first-aid, local fundraising and mobile health camps.

At present, most of the district chapters are continuing to distribute various food, nonfood and medical items collected mostly through local donations and/or through the utilisation of internal resources. The NRCS national headquarters has kept 3,621 packages of relief materials on standby to send to the affected districts once the needs assessment reports are finalized.

Initial indications are showing that the need for relief materials is growing. Although the affected district chapters have been responding rapidly and effectively to the disaster, they were able to assist just a small percentage of the affected population. At present, the NRCS has only 12% of its relief materials remaining in stock, with many assessment reports still to arrive from remote areas this will not be enough to continue assisting the vulnerable population.

On 31 July, the Nepal-based representative of the Swiss Red Cross returned from two severely flood affected districts in central Nepal, Dhanufa and Mahatari. Though he was unable to visit four stricken village development committee (local level administration unit) areas and other nearby villages, as they remained cut off by flood waters and landslides blocking access paths and roads, he was able to report that although the local NRCS branch had mobilised all its resources, including that available from national headquarters, there still remained an urgent need for food and tarpaulins. This scenario appears to be a microcosm of what is occurring throughout most of the affected districts. Further information concerning the situation in the east of the country is expected in the next day or two from the bilateral delegate of the Japanese Red Cross which has a presence in that area..

The Head of the Federation's South Asia Regional Delegation is presently in Nepal visiting the Nepal Red Cross Society. During his nine-days visit, the HoRD will meet with the ICRC Head of Delegation in Nepal and visit some of the affected areas with senior NRCS officials. On 1 August he also met with the ICRC Head of Delegation in Nepal, and senior NRCS officials, to develop a common approach to the disaster, in view of the current armed conflict situation which is ongoing in many parts of the country. A clear working agreement to shape the nature of the future relief operation is expected to be concluded in the next few days. The Regional Disaster Response Delegate will travel to Katmandu on 2 August to further assist the Nepal Red Cross in operational planning and situation assessment.

Needs or Contingency planning

The overall picture across the three affected countries is slowly becoming clearer as vital information continues to flow in from the far, isolated corners of the vast area concerned. It is expected that a more complete picture will be available by the end of this week (4 August) after which the situation will be further analysed to determine the appropriate action required in support of the work currently underway by the three national societies. It is likely that there will be a call, early next week, for international support for the escalating relief activities of the Nepal and India Red Cross societies.

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

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

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