

BANGLADESH: TORNADO

13 October 1997

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The Disaster

On Sunday, 12 October, at approximately 17.30 hours, a tornado with wind speeds of 65-75 kms per hour hit the Biswa Ijtema Ground in Tongi District, some 20 kms north of Dhaka city, where thousands of people were gathered for sunset prayers. The tornado killed 15 people (unconfirmed figure) and injuring hundreds more, many critically.

The Ground, North of the Turag River, is a flat area used for religious gatherings. Some 100,000 people, including many from neighbouring Muslim countries, had assembled for a ten-day prayer meeting, of which Sunday was the final day. The tornado, which lasted several minutes, levelled the tin-roofed structure set up for the religious ceremonies. Most of the dead and injured were hit by flying corrugated-iron sheeting and by bamboo from the temporary structure; others were trampled in the panic as the storm cut electricity lines and plunged the area into darkness.

Some 500 injured persons were taken to Tongi Hospital and local clinics, or transported in open trucks to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital and other city hospitals. Fire brigade teams from the area also helped rescue the injured. Many mud houses around the epicentre of the tornado are reported to have collapsed.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

Two hours after the tornado hit, the Acting Secretary General of the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) and the Head of the Federation Delegation visited the area, assessed the damage and spoke with local officials. An ambulance from the Holy Family Hospital was dispatched to the area.

This morning (13 October), the BDRCS sent a medical team composed of a doctor and several first aid workers to the site. The team carried medical supplies, and powdered milk which will be given to Tongi Hospital. The medical team will report to BDRCS Headquarters and provide information as to any further assistance which may be required.

Given the relatively small scale of the damage and the immediate mobilisation of local resources, the BDRCS does not foresee any need for international assistance.

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