

BANGLADESH: CYCLONE

19 May 1997

Information Bulletin N° 01

The Disaster

Cyclone B-One has developed from a depression over the west-central area of the Bay of Bengal. It is at present moving north-north-eastwards and intensifying. At 1100 today it was about 300 km south of Chittagong Port, 250 km south-south-west of Cox's Bazar and 330 km southeast of Khulna Town (Near Latitude 19.8 N and Longitude 90.5 E). The maximum sustained wind speed within 64 km of the storm centre is about 90 kph rising to 110 kph in squalls. The sea remains very rough. The centre of the cyclone is most likely to cross land somewhere between Chittagong and Teknaf in the south-east of Bangladesh during the night between May 19 and 20, causing comparatively limited damage.

Government Action

An emergency meeting was called by the Secretary of the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MDMR) at 1200 today. This was attended by representatives from the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) and the Federation Delegation. According to information given, the cyclone is currently moving at a speed of 15-25 kph and is expected to strike during low tide between 2100 and 2400, with a surge of up to seven feet in the Chittagong and Cox's Bazar regions around midnight today. However, the meteorological department is predicting as alternative scenarios, that a) the cyclone may increase its forward speed and make landfall earlier, or b) it may become stagnant, build up more force and strike some time tomorrow. Both cases would be much more destructive than currently expected. The signal number remains at seven with a maximum of 10 (signals 8-10 mean evacuation to shelters). The meeting advised that people in low-lying coastal areas should be warned to start preparing for evacuation to safer places.

The Government of Bangladesh is co-ordinating preparations among the ministries and organisations concerned. An interministerial meeting has been scheduled for 1430 this afternoon at the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

All 121 HF and VHF radio stations operated by the BDRCS had completed their notification process within an hour of the cyclone warning. A safety warning for all offshore islands and low-lying coastal areas was transmitted from BDRCS NHQ to Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP) local units at 1200 hours today and flag warning signals were hoisted. The CPP volunteers (this is a joint Government/BDRCS programme) have been mobilised to warn the local population by loudhailer and door-to-door approaches. The National Society's CPP Operations Room is fully manned and all stations on full state of alert.

Needs

Possible food, medicine and shelter needs are anticipated. The Federation will continue to inform interested National Societies as the situation develops.

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