

BANGLADESH: FLOODS

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The Disaster

Countrywide incessant rainfall in the 36 hours between 0600 hours on 10 July and 1800 hours on 11 July, measuring as much as 358 mm in Chandpur, and 239 mm in Madaripur, has further aggravated the flood situation in Bangladesh. So far, 18 flood related deaths have been unofficially reported in three northern districts of Bangladesh. Meanwhile, flooding in the adjacent Indian states of Assam and Himachal, where a 100 year record rainfall of 474 mm in 12 hours was reported in the Jalpaiguri district, is causing concern in Bangladesh, since most of the rivers there flow through Bangladesh into the Bay of Bengal.

According to the Flood Warning Centre of the Bangladesh Water Development Board on 11 July all of the country's 25 main rivers registered a rise in water level and at least 4 of them are flowing above danger level. The hydrological and meteorological authorities are concerned that further rainfall will result in increased flooding throughout the country.

River erosion has taken a serious turn. According to press and field reports, four entire villages in Munshiganj and Manikganj districts were swept away by the rivers Padma and Jamuna, rendering about 10,000 people homeless. In Brahmanbaria districts, 25 villages are under threat. Habitats and crop fields are being eroded every day along these mighty rivers, causing considerable hardship. Embankments have either been breached or have collapsed. Communication has been disrupted in some places such as the Sylhet - Comilla highway due to the destruction of culverts and bridges.

The government has opened two control rooms, one at the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief and the other at the Directorate of Disaster Management to monitor the situation. Directives have already been sent to the district administration. The army has been kept on an emergency footing to help the water board personnel in repairing breaches of dikes and in evacuating people.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) and the Federation Delegation have been monitoring closely the situation since the onset of the monsoon this year. With reports flowing in from the local BDRCS units on the deteriorating situation, together with requests for relief supplies, the Management decided to send an initial amount of supplies, comprising 13 MT of rice, 2.5 MT of Dal (lentil), 16 bales of clothes, 400 aluminium drinking mugs and 10 rolls of plastic sheets, to the worst affected districts of Chittagong, Cox's Bazar, Rangamati, Khagrachori, Bandarban, Serajganj, Kurigram, Bogra and Tangail.

The relief goods were transported from the BDRCS National headquarters (NHQ) to the respective unit offices by truck. The units have already distributed the goods as per instructions and set rules.

The Federation secretariat has already advanced CHF 100,000 from the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) to meet immediate needs. A contribution of CHF 54,000 has been announced by the Finnish Red Cross.

The Federation and BDRCS Management are meeting regularly to monitor events. Today, 12 July, the BDRCS Chairman and Acting Secretary General met with the Federation's Head of Delegation to plan for a worst case scenario. Further meetings will be held in the coming days with Government experts monitoring the floods and current monsoon in order to plan with a greater degree of accuracy. Contacts with the local BDRCS units are being maintained by telephone, which is fortunately operating in most affected areas.. Some units under the CBDP/ID programmes have filed reports on preliminary needs assessments, which helps the planning of allocations at NHQ.

The Federation and BDRCS are finalising tendering documents for procurement of 140 MT of food items. In addition local Red Crescent units are collecting relief materials and funds to augment relief goods received from BDRCS national HQ.

A major attribute in favour of the BDRCS flood relief operation this year is the enhanced capacity of the BDRCS branches at district level due to the considerable experience gained by staff and volunteers during the prolonged flood relief operation in 1998 and through the Community Based Disaster Preparedness Programme.

The Federation's Head of Delegation and the national treasurer of the BDRCS will accompany the Minister of Water Resources and Minister of Shipping and Water Transport on a field trip on 14 July to inspect some flood affected areas.

Immediate Needs

In Information Bulletin No.1, CHF 250,000 was sought to purchase food ration packs of 10 kg rice, 2 kg dal and 2 litres of oil for 20,000 families. The CHF 100,000 released from the Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund and the Finnish Red Cross contribution has enabled the BDRCS to commence its relief operation. Further funds are sought to continue and possibly expand the relief efforts. With a deteriorating flood situation caused by an increasingly active monsoon, the needs and the numbers of the worst affected are rising. The last information bulletin estimated that two million people were affected, and reports now suggest this figure will increase. As was the case last year, distribution of seeds and household items, including clothes, may be needed.

For the National Society's plan of action, please refer to Information Bulletin No. 1. For further information, please contact Kentaro Nagazumi, tel. 0041 22 7304 273 or email nagazumi@ifrc.org.

Peter Rees-Gildea
Director
Operations Funding & Reporting Department

Hiroshi Higashiura
Director
Asia & Pacific Department

