

BANGLADESH: FLOODS

20 August 1999

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The Disaster

During the past few days the monsoon has intensified over most of Bangladesh. The GOB Flood Information Centre (FFWC) reported moderately heavy to heavy rainfall in many places throughout the country. Significant rainfall was recorded in eastern and southern parts of the country. The Flood Forecasting Weather Centre (FFWC) and the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) reported a rise of the water levels in the Matamuhuri and Sangu rivers in the South Eastern Hill Basin, in all rivers in the Meghna basin, Brahmaputra-Jamuna in Brahmaputra basin and Padma, Koratoa and Punarbaba in the Ganges basin. Both the Brahmaputra-Jamuna and the Ganges-Padma river systems are rising steadily and the low-lying areas of the two river basins are likely to be inundated very soon. Cox's Bazar and Bandarban districts have already been badly affected by flooding. The road to Chittagong was temporarily cut. Up to 400,000 people are reported to be stranded in Chakoria Thana.

Erosion has been severe along the banks of the rivers Brahmaputra, Padma, Meghna and Jamuna, affecting thousands of families, most of whom have had to move before. Whenever their land is threatened, they dismantle their bamboo and tin sheet house and put it up wherever they can find space -- on an embankment, or on somebody else's land.

Earlier, after the breaching of the Gumti embankment mid-July, flood waters inundated three thanas in Comilla district -- Burichang, Debidwar and Chandina -- damaging more than 133,000 acres of rice, 1,760 km roads and 41,386 houses. Out of a total 100,000 families, 20,000 were severely affected and are still in temporary shelters on the embankments.

BDRCS staff and the Federation DP delegate have just returned from monitoring seven districts in northern Bangladesh to determine the seriousness of the situation and what the BDRCS might do to assist the worst affected.

BDRCS district units are keeping in regular touch with their national headquarters, and are gathering and recording data of where the floods and river erosion are occurring. The units are working in close co-operation with (Govt) Thana officials.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

Procurement

The Federation Delegation initiated procurement of 300 mt of rice and 60 mt of dal in late July. Deliveries to BDRCS NHQ Warehouse will be completed in the next few days. The BDRCS started forwarding the supplies to 18 units on 5 August .

Assessment

The Relief Department, BDRCS NHQ, has instructed the 18 flood affected district units to start their assessment in accordance with the guidelines of the "Disaster Relief Field Manual".

The worst hit areas are the three thanas in Comilla district, which cover 11 unions. BDRCS NHQ temporarily transferred one Assistant Director to strengthen the Unit. The Unit has set up three teams, each responsible for one of the three thanas. Each team is composed of two executive committee members, one BDRCS staff member and seven Red Crescent Youth volunteers. Altogether, they have selected 13,000 beneficiary families.

Immediate Needs include:

- Food, clothing, shelter and medical assistance
- Construction materials for temporary housing.

Long term needs include:

- vegetable and cereal seeds
- loans for income generation projects
- disaster preparedness and management training
- basic health education
- housing assistance.

Medical

On 1 August BDRCS sent 10 medical teams to Comilla district for a period of 15 days. They were composed of one medical doctor, one paramedic, one midwife and one RCY volunteer. Each team treated an average of 100 persons a day, mostly children. Most of the patients were suffering from cold, fever, fungal skin infection and there were a few cases of diarrhoea. In general, the health situation is under control.

Relief

The 18 BDRCS local units distributed compressed rice to a total of 10,000 families immediately after the first wave of flooding in July.

BDRCS is currently in the second phase of its relief operation in 18 districts where 30,000 more families are expected to be served. Relief goods comprising 300 MT of rice and 60 MT of dal have been distributed to the Units, as follows:

Sl. No.	Units	I T E M		No. of families
		Rice (mt)	Dal (mt)	
1	Chittagong	10	2	1,000
2	Cox's Bazar	10	2	1,000
3	Bandarban	10	2	1,000
4	Rangamati	10	2	1,000
5	Khagrachari	10	2	1,000
6	Serajganj	10	2	1,000
7	Kurigram	10	2	1,000
8	Bogra	10	2	1,000
9	Tangail	10	2	1,000
10	Pabna	10	2	1,000
11	Laxmipur	10	2	1,000
12	Jamalpur	10	2	1,000
13	Sunamgonj	10	2	1,000
14	Comilla	130	26	13,000
15	Chandpur	10	2	1,000
16	Gaibanda	10	2	1,000
17	Lalmonirhat	10	2	1,000
18	Dhaka City	10	2	1,000
Total		300	60	30,000

The Comilla district unit started distribution on 11 August and to date has reached 3,500 out of 13,000 families. The other districts began receiving supplies in the last few days.

Conclusion

The increasingly bad weather this week and ominous signals from weather forecasters that the situation could take a further turn for the worse early next week are giving rise to fears that this year's floods could become as bad as last year's, when two-thirds of the country was inundated. Should this happen, an appeal for international assistance might be necessary. The Federation Secretariat is in daily contact with its Delegation in Dhaka: it will inform National Societies immediately of any new developments.

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