

# ***SRI LANKA: Floods and storms***

29 April 1999

## ***Information Bulletin N° 01***

### ***The Disaster***

Unusually heavy rains for this time of year and violent thunderstorms along the western and south-western coast of Sri Lanka between 16 and 21 April caused widespread damage and severe floods in the south-west and south of the country. The main rivers, Kelani and Kalu, rose by over seven feet, and caused additional flooding, made worse by slow run-off. Some of the worst areas received as much as 290 mm of rain in 24 hours, and even the capital, Colombo, where 284 mm fell within 24 hours, experienced bad flooding in many sectors of the city.

The worst affected districts are Ratnapura, Colombo, Kalutara, Gampaha, Galle, Kandy, Matara and Kegalle, all located between the coast and the Kandyan highlands.

Six persons were reported killed by lightning, landslides or floods. Thousands of houses were damaged or destroyed, and initial official figures place the number of homeless at around 75,000 families (the average family in Sri Lanka consists of five members). In Colombo alone an estimated 12,400 families were affected. The damage is reportedly much worse in the rural areas particularly in Ratnapura District, but precise information is difficult to come by since many of the affected areas are totally cut off, with roads inundated and power and telephone lines damaged. The railway line from Colombo to Kandy has been blocked since 19 April, when boulders from a landslide damaged the tracks.

| <i><b>Districts</b></i> | <i><b>Sub-Divisions</b></i>  | <i><b>Estimated number of affected families</b></i> |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| Colombo                 | Kolonnawa, Nugegoda, Dehiwala, Moratuwa, Maharagama, Piliyandala, Thimbirigasyaya, Colombo, Kaduwela, Hanwella | 26,866  |
| Kalutara                | Madurawala, Milleniya, Agalawatte, Horana, Dodangoda, Kalutara, Panadura, Beruwala                             | 3,474   |
| Kegalle                 | Ruwanwella, Dehiowita, Bulathkohupitiya  | 222   |
| Matara                  |  | 100   |
| Kandy                   | Peradeniya   | 31  |
| Gampaha                 | Katana, Wattala  | 8,846   |
| Ratnapura               | Ratnapura, Elapatha, Kuruwita, Ayagama, Kiriella, Kalawana, Nivithigala, Ehiliyagoda, Pelmadulla               | 24,409  |
| Galle                   | Thawalama, Nagoda, Neluwa, Baddegama, Wliwitiya  | 10,000  |
| Total                   |  | <b>73,948</b>                                       |

## ***Government Action***

As a standard procedure, the Social Services Department and other Government agencies provide cooked food for the first three days and then dry rations for approximately seven days to those who have lost their homes and/ or are temporarily housed in Government buildings, schools, etc. In one Colombo district, some 5,000 families were evacuated from an area threatened by a landslide. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Development has established relief co-ordination units in the capital and in districts. The Sri Lankan Navy has made boats available to assist relief efforts along the coast, and the Air Force is flying helicopter reconnaissance missions to determine the number of marooned people who need to be rescued.

Financial assistance to enable flood victims to repair houses is currently under discussion.

## ***Red Cross/Red Crescent Action***

By 21 April, Red Cross branch secretaries from Ratnapura, Gampaha, and Galle District had contacted the SLRCS National Headquarters with the first reports of damage. Staff and volunteers of these branches have begun more detailed assessments among the most vulnerable sections of the affected population, but because of the many people marooned, the continuing rains, and the wide areas still under water, it has not yet been possible to collect and transmit more reliable data.

The Relief Committee recently appointed by the SLRCS Board of Governors was convened immediately to co-ordinate and implement relief action. Individual members of the Relief Committee have been assigned specific tasks, such as collection of information from branches and Government authorities, procurement, distribution, registration and distribution records, and publicity. The Director of Development was appointed overall co-ordinator.

As it is not yet possible to provide verified and concise information at this stage, a detailed needs assessment will be undertaken as soon as waters recede and areas become accessible. In those areas where SLRCS maintains a branch structure, staff and volunteers from those branches will be involved in data collection. In areas where branches were dissolved, National Headquarters staff and members of the Relief Committee have been assigned to assist where necessary in the needs assessment in order to select the most vulnerable families.

## ***Needs***

The SLRCS proposes to assist up to 5,000 families, mainly in two categories: (a) those who have lost most or all of their belongings (damaged or washed away), and (b) those whose house was damaged or destroyed. Although the latter category will likely receive some form of Government aid, they will nevertheless still be in need of assistance.

It is planned to carry out the following operation:

| <b>Item</b>                                    | <b>Number of families</b> | <b>Quantity</b> | <b>Estimated costs (LKR)</b> | <b>Estimated costs (CHF)</b> |
|--|---------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Bed sheets (2 / family)</b>                 | 5,000                     | 10,000          | 2,000,000                    | 42,000                       |
| <b>Grass mats (2 / family)</b>                 | 5,000                     | 10,000          | 1,000,000                    | 21,000                       |
| <b>Galvanised roof sheets (10-15 / family)</b> | Selected families only    | 2,000           | 600,000                      | 12,600                       |
| <b>Kitchen Utensils (1 set / family)</b>       | Selected families only    | 3,000           | 1,200,000                    | 25,200                       |
| <b>Truck hire</b>                              |                           | for 7 districts | 70,000                       | 1,500                        |
| <b>Logistics, load / unload</b>                |                           | for 7 districts | 50,000                       | 1,050                        |
| <b>Fuel, travel</b>                            |                           |                 | 25,000                       | 540                          |
| <b>Administration</b>                          |                           |                 | 494,500                      | 10,385                       |
| <b>Federation</b>                              |                           |                 |                              | 6,000.00                     |
| <b>T O T A L</b>                               |                           |                 | <b>5,439,500.00</b>          | <b>125,275.00</b>            |

Procurement will be undertaken by the Finance Committee of SLRCS according to established rules and procedures. The previous operation in January 1999 has shown that this can be completed within a few days. Distributions will be carried out with the involvement of the Relief Committee, branch committees and relevant Government authorities. Once more detailed data has been collected it will be used to fine-tune the operation.

The SLRCS is co-ordinating with both the International Federation and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Delegations in-country. The International Federation has released CHF 50,000 from its Disaster Relief Emergency Fund. Contributions to assist the SLRCS in meeting the needs of the flood victims are encouraged.

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