

## **INDIA: FLOODS**

21 February,  
2001

*appeal no. 19/2000*

*situation report no. 7*

*period covered: 20 January 2001 - 16 February 2001*

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*The relief operation in north and north east India, launched after several waves of flooding last year, should be completed by March. Mobile medical teams working in remote communities, are dealing with heavy caseloads and proving so necessary that local Red Cross branches are searching for ways to make them permanent. Health and relief training for staff and volunteers in the area continues apace. All procurement of relief items has been completed and distributions to branches are under way. In Assam, considered one of India's most quake prone areas, last month's massive earthquake in Gujarat has brought calls for greater preparedness measures in the state.*

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### ***The context***

Over 30 million people were affected by the floods in north and north eastern India between July and September 2000. In the north-eastern state of Assam, flooding began in late July and worsened dramatically at the beginning of August when flash floods resulting from heavy rains in the Himalayas swept south, causing breaches in embankments along many parts of the Brahmaputra river and its tributaries, and inundating the surrounding area. The combined death toll due to floods, landslides and torrential rains in India, Bangladesh and Bhutan stands at over 1,500.

The situation became critical in the state of West Bengal in September, when heavy monsoon rains caused a second wave of floods that swept across a vast and densely populated area. Local authorities report that over 17 million people were forced to flee their homes. The floods claimed 1,266 lives, and around 74,000 head of cattle perished.

The northern state of Bihar was severely affected by another disastrous wave of floods in September. Three consecutive flood waves swept through a total of 31 districts and claimed 163 lives.

In addition to Assam, West Bengal and Bihar, the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Maharashtra also experienced extensive flooding caused by seasonal monsoon rains. Now that the waters have receded, many people are attempting to return to their homes. However, millions who lost their houses are still living in makeshift shelters.

## ***Latest events***

After six months, life is slowly returning to normal in many of the flood-affected regions. However, hundreds of thousands of people remain in a very vulnerable situation as rehabilitation efforts fail to reach some of the most remote areas of Assam and West Bengal. The total destruction of crop land is hampering the economic recovery of many affected communities and many of the homeless are still in temporary relief camps, surviving with very little or no assistance at all. The dramatic changes in river courses, observed mostly in some eastern parts of Assam, are a cause of major concern for the next monsoon season, which could start as early as May or June.

Meanwhile, after the massive earthquake which struck the western Indian state of Gujarat on 26 January this year, awareness of the importance of disaster preparedness has grown in Assam, considered one of the most earthquake-prone regions of India. The disaster in Gujarat has prompted a call for more preventive and preparedness measures by the local population and disaster response authorities in Assam.

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

*Logistics & relief:* All local procurement of food and relief supplies for the India floods operation was completed in January. However, distributions are way behind schedule in all three states (Assam, West Bengal and particularly Bihar), mainly due to the lengthy procurement procedures and suppliers' delays in delivering items to the IRCS State branches. Relief distributions to date have included a total of 23,000 tarpaulins and kitchen sets in Assam and West Bengal and some 28,000 mosquito nets in Assam. Additional items such as blankets and garments are still in the pipeline from Delhi: the first consignments have just arrived in the IRCS regional warehouse in Calcutta. Relief distributions will resume as soon as the remaining supplies reach the IRCS district branches. In addition, one fibre glass boat and one aluminium boat, funded by the Spanish Red Cross, have been purchased for the Assam State branch, to be utilised as floating mobile clinics. Delivery is expected shortly.

*Health:* The health programme in Assam, addressing acute needs of the flood-affected population in some of the most remote areas of India, is progressing well. A total of six mobile clinics continue to take basic health care to rural villages in six districts which were badly affected by the August floods. Each team is seeing between 100 to 200 patients per day and providing them with basic care and medicines, which most would be unable to afford. Due to the huge demand for the services of these mobile units, the local IRCS branches involved in the operation are now seeking ways to continue the project on a long term basis. Fund raising remains one of the main challenges to ensuring the sustainability of this programme after April,

when the Federation operation is expected to be completed. So far, the health programme in Assam has helped to improve the image of the Red Cross as an active organisation providing crucial and highly visible health assistance in some remote areas neglected by other humanitarian organisations and by an over-stretched public health system.

During the reporting period, another two training courses have been carried out in Guwahati: one for some 60 Red Cross volunteers from a total of 21 district branches throughout Assam and a second for 60 traditional birth attendants from rural communities. The two-week training of volunteers consists of lectures, practical demonstrations, simulation exercises, field visits, group work and discussions on the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Principles, first aid, mother and child care, reproductive health, nutrition, infectious diseases and disasters. Particular emphasis is placed on earthquake preparedness, because of Assam's vulnerability. So far, a total of 175 volunteers and traditional birth attendants have been trained. The next course, to be attended by another group of 60 volunteers selected by the district branches, is scheduled to take place from 19 February to 4 March 2001.

Meanwhile, some of the local branches which sent participants for the training course in Guwahati are initiating their own first aid courses for junior Red Cross volunteers, utilising the guidelines provided by the Federation health delegate and deploying their already trained volunteers as instructors. In addition, the ICRC will conduct a "first aid master training course" targeting Red Cross volunteers from all north-eastern states of India. A group of 20 volunteers already trained by the Federation and IRCS will be among the participants.

Lastly, the Federation health delegate for the operation has completed an evaluation of the use of a sachet for the preparation of safe therapeutic milk, ORS and other drinks from contaminated water. The evaluation was carried out by the Red Cross medical teams in the two flood-affected districts of Kamrup and Mangaldai. The sachets utilise a cellulose membrane which permits water to hydrate the sachet contents, while substantially reducing the level of bacterial contamination. The aim of the field trial in Assam was to determine the efficiency of use in the field and test the general acceptability of the product among the local population. One specific objective was to verify if the instructions for use were sufficiently clear and precise. The main conclusions of this evaluation were very positive. (A full report is available from the Federation Secretariat's health department).

*Federation Delegation:* The India floods team has been down-sized to four delegates, covering health, logistics, relief, and information and reporting. The Head of Delegation left New Delhi at the end of January. One of the health delegates based in West Bengal, the logistics delegate and the relief delegate were assigned to the Gujarat earthquake operation in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. The India floods relief and logistics delegates have now been redeployed to the floods operation. The relief delegate is already back in Calcutta, from where he will continue to follow up on relief distributions in West Bengal and Bihar until the completion of the programme.

## ***External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media***

A press conference was held in Guwahati, Assam, on 10 February 2001. During this conference, attended by a large number of journalists from both local and national media, Federation delegates and the local IRCS officers provided an overview of the floods relief operation and addressed several issues related mostly to earthquake preparedness. The IRCS Assam State branch has taken the opportunity, after the recent earthquake in Gujarat, to promote a wider debate about the vulnerability of Assam to disasters such as earthquakes, floods and droughts, making a general call for more disaster preparedness and mitigation in north-eastern India.

## *Outstanding needs*

The relief activities in flood-stricken north eastern India are nearing completion and thanks to generous donor response there are currently no outstanding needs.

## *Contributions*

See Annex 1 for details.

Peter Rees-Gildea  
Head a. i.  
Relationship Management Department

Hiroshi Higashiura  
Head,  
Asia and Pacific Department

**This and other reports on Federation operations are available on the Federation's website: <http://www.ifrc.org>**

India Floods						ANNEX 1
APPEAL No. 19/2000		PLEDGES RECEIVED			02/20/01	
DONOR	CATEGORY	QUANTITY	UNIT	VALUE CHF	DATE	COMMENT
<b>CASH</b>						
REQUESTED IN APPEAL CHF ----->				<b>3,480,157</b>		<b>TOTAL COVERAGE 129.4%</b>
AMERICAN - PRIVATE		20	USD	34	22.08.00	
AUSTRALIAN - RC		11,613	AUD	11,594	02.10.00	
BRITISH - RC		50,000	GBP	126,000	11.08.00	PURCHASE, TRANSPORT & DISTRIBUTION OF RICE
BRITISH GOVT/RC - DFID		245,098	GBP	617,646	11.08.00	
CANADIAN - GOVT/RC		99,000	CAD	111,118	11.08.00	
DANISH - RC		250,000	DKK	52,650	21.08.00	
DANISH - RC		950,000	DKK	200,070	14.08.00	
DANISH - RC		231,250	DKK	48,285	29.09.00	
ECHO		755,000	EUR	1,153,489	26.10.00	EC/IND/210/2000/01001
FINNISH - RC		84,094	EUR	132,162	11.08.00	
FINNISH - RC		33,637	EUR	52,383	27.09.00	
FINNISH - GOVT		134,550	EUR	205,565	17.11.00	
GERMAN - GOVT		300,000	DEM	234,330	02.10.00	15'800 KITCHEN SETS, 3 NEW EMERGENCY HEALTH KITS, INCL. TRANSPORT
ICELANDIC - RC		200,000	ISK	4,456	11.08.00	
IRANIAN - RC		30,000	USD	51,375	23.09.00	
JAPANESE - RC				150,000	14.08.00	
JAPANESE - RC				148,000	02.10.00	
KOREA, REPUBLIC OF - RC				30,000	28.08.00	
LIECHTENSTEIN				50,000	02.10.00	
LIECHTENSTEIN - RC				300	28.11.00	
MONACO - RC		40,000	FRF	9,316	11.08.00	
NETHERLANDS - GOVT		400,000	NLG	277,277	09.10.00	BLANKETS
NETHERLANDS - RC				30,000	09.10.00	
NORWEGIAN - GOVT/RC		2,886,000	NOK	546,245	05.12.00	
SPANISH - RC		5,000,000	ESP	47,225	18.08.00	SPANISH DEL. MEMBER OF FACT TEAM
SWEDISH - GOVT/RC		750,000	SEK	140,775	11.08.00	
SWEDISH - RC		250,000	SEK	46,925	11.08.00	
<b>SUB/TOTAL RECEIVED IN CASH</b>				<b>4,477,220</b>	<b>CHF</b>	<b>128.6%</b>

<b>KIND AND SERVICES (INCLUDING PERSONNEL)</b>						
DONOR	CATEGORY	QUANTITY	UNIT	VALUE CHF	DATE	COMMENT
Finland	Delegate(s)			16,427		
Japan	Delegate(s)			9,856		
<b>SUB/TOTAL RECEIVED IN KIND/SERVICES</b>				26,283	CHF	0.8%
<b>ADDITIONAL TO APPEAL BUDGET</b>						
DONOR	CATEGORY	QUANTITY	UNIT	VALUE CHF	DATE	COMMENT
<b>SUB/TOTAL RECEIVED</b>				0	CHF	
<b>THE FOLLOWING PROJECTS ARE LINKED TO THIS APPEAL:</b>						