

BANGLADESH: Storms and floods

29 May 2000

Information Bulletin N° 1

The Disaster

In the last few days, storms, flash floods, overflowing rivers and embankment erosions have claimed dozens of lives and destroyed tens of thousands of homes, chiefly along Bangladesh's major river system. The rains have come earlier than usual this year, and could herald bad flooding in a few months time.

Two persons died yesterday, about 100 were injured, and over 25,000 thatched houses were damaged when storms battered large areas of Magura, Jhenaidah, Barisal and Shariatpur. The previous day a storm battered Dhaka, the capital, claiming 11 lives. Two other storms on 26 May killed one person and demolished over 2,000 houses in Keshorehganj district and injured at least 30 people and damaged about 1,000 houses in Narayanganj district.

Over 500 families have been evacuated along the river Shangu in the hill district of Bandarban as three days of incessant rains since 23 May caused flash floods in several parts of the south eastern hill basin, including Chittagong.

On 27 May, the four major rivers -- Padma, Meghna, Brahmaputra and Jamuna -- rose rapidly above the flood levels of recent years. The Manu river in Moulvibazar reached its highest ever recorded water level of 298 cm yesterday, leaving at least 70,000 people marooned. Chandpur town came under threat last week when part of the embankment was eroded by the river Meghna, and a similar danger faces Rajshah on the river Padma. Large scale erosion has also been occurring along the rivers Karnafuli, Shankha, Halda and Isamati in the district of Chittagong.

Weather experts have predicted unusually heavy rainfall this year in Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Space Research and Remote Sensing Organisation warned recently: "Due to the rapidly rising phases of the Southern Oscillation Index (SOI) - a means of monitoring the El/Nino- La Nina situation -- severe flooding is expected this year. The SOI was +9.4 in March and +17 in April and is likely to be much more in May". Some 12,000 km of riverbank are exposed to erosion in Bangladesh.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The chief of the Disaster Management Division of BDRCS was among those attending an inter-ministerial meeting held yesterday under the auspices of the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, to review the overall flood situation and discuss preparedness and relief issues. The

BDRCS/Federation are closely monitoring the daily developments and reviewing preparedness and response systems in anticipation of a worsening situation from mid-year onwards.

Peter Rees-Gildea
Director
Operations Funding and Reporting Department

Hiroshi Higashiura
Director
Asia and Pacific Department

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