

INFORMATION BULLETIN



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération Internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

INDIA, NEPAL, BANGLADESH: MONSOON FLOODS

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The Federation's mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity. It is the world's largest humanitarian organization and its millions of volunteers are active in over 181 countries.

In Brief

This Information Bulletin (no. 1/2004) is being issued for information only. The Federation is not seeking funding or other assistance from donors for this operation at this time. Should the situation deteriorate, however, support in the form of external assistance may be requested. Donors are encouraged to support the 2004 Annual Appeals for these countries.

Note also previous flood Information Bulletins 1&2 issued for Bangladesh (28 June, 1 July), and Information Bulletin 1 issued for India (25 June).

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The Situation

Over 150 people have died and more than five million have been made homeless by heavy monsoon flooding in areas of India, Bangladesh and Nepal. Landslides have also impacted upon communities. Bangladesh is the worst

affected with three million homeless, while two million people have been displaced in the north-eastern Indian state of Assam.

The south-west monsoon commenced in mid-May, and will continue through until September. Heavy rains began to lash some areas in mid-June and the situation has become particularly severe since the start of July. Overall the Monsoon is being described as heavier and earlier in some regions, particularly in north-eastern India and Bangladesh. Indian government officials are describing the flooding in Assam as the worst in that state in recent years, with 22 out of 24 districts inundated.

However, while flooding in some areas is severe, it is not approaching the record levels of 1998 when 60 million people were affected in India, Bangladesh and Nepal.



Flooding has struck areas of Nepal and Bangladesh and the north-eastern Indian states of Bihar and Assam

The current situation is very serious for those affected communities, but overall the current Monsoon season, still in its early stages, could be termed as relatively normal. However, vigilance will be required over the coming weeks and months as the Monsoon unfolds. Communities are also vulnerable to localised weather and the degree of melt in the Himalayas which feed into several major rivers.

There have been intermittent disaster preparedness measures in the region for almost 30 years, with these becoming far more focused following the 1998 floods with significant assistance from DFID and also generous support from the Finnish, Swedish, New Zealand, Netherlands, Kuwait and German National Societies, as well as DIPECHO (Bangladesh). These improved levels of disaster preparedness are greatly assisting the response to the current situation.

Bangladesh

A large weather depression over West Bengal and Assam (India) has led to significant areas of Bangladesh being inundated by flooding. Driving monsoon rains have caused rivers to burst their banks and swamp low-lying areas in the northern, north-eastern and central regions. To date 16 districts have reported severe flooding, and many rivers including Brahmaputra, Jamuna in the Brahmaputra basin, Surma and Kushiara in the Meghna basin are flowing above danger levels and especially in the Sylhet division.



*Man carries his son through floodwaters in village near Sylhet, Bangladesh.
Reuters/Rafiqur Rahman- courtesy
www.alertnmet.org*

The weather forecast indicates the floods are likely to inundate lowlands in and around Dhaka and Narayanganj in the next 48 hours.

According to media reports, northern districts are the worst hit by the floods leaving 20 people dead and some 3 million marooned and stranded, taking refuge in public buildings and on road embankments. Some 32,000 hectares (80,000 acres) of land has been inundated and it is feared there could be a 20 percent crop loss. Rail links with the north have been cut off since July 12 and road communication within Sylhet division has also been disrupted at several places. Heavy rains have also resulted in several landslides in the south-eastern port city of Chittagong cutting off road communication. The country's lone hydroelectric dam in the Chittagong Hill Tracts is under threat as water levels are at dangerous levels and rising alarmingly.

This years flooding is more severe than that experienced in 2002 and has commenced earlier. Government officials have warned that the flood situation is likely to further worsen in the coming days and weeks.

India

The north-eastern states of Assam and Bihar have been particularly hard hit. The India Meteorological Department is describing the South-West Monsoon as being heavier and earlier in some areas. However, it should be noted there is concern that for other regions of India the Monsoon may not reach normal levels which would be detrimental to the agricultural sector in those states.

Assam: According to media reports heavy rains and a breach in a reservoir in Bhutan, has resulted in flash floods inundating lower Assam districts raising the death toll to 50. According to the latest United Nations Development Project (UNDP) reports, 80 percent of districts have been flooded with five of them severely damaged.

According to the latest UNDP reports the current situation is as follows:

- A huge area is under water in the affected districts and people have taken shelter on embankments.
- 2,794 villages have so far been affected by floods this year affecting a population of 2.5 million
- 14,320 houses have been washed away and 25,000 houses have been partially damaged.
- Total crop area affected is estimated at 400,000 hectares
- There have been 58 breaches of embankments since April, of which 24 major breaches have occurred in July. There is the threat of further breaches on the embankment of the Brahmaputra river and its tributaries
- The situation in Barak valley is very critical as the Kushiara and Katakhal, both the tributaries of Barak valley has flooded vast areas causing extensive damage in Hailakandi and Karimganj districts.
- Roads and other communication have been disrupted in the state particularly in lower Assam.

In a separate incident at least 40 people packed in a wooden boat drowned while trying to escape to higher ground on 10 July.

Meanwhile Majuli, the world's largest river island, was cut-off from the rest of the country with the suspension of ferry services as the Brahmaputra was flowing 1.6 metres above danger level.

The State Government has released an aid package of Rs 600 million (approximately CHF 17 million) for relief and rescue operations.

Bihar: A total of 14 districts have been affected. There have been media reports of at least 14 drownings in the swollen Bagmati River. The levels in several other rivers are reporting to still be rising. The State Government has initiated various relief operations in the flood affected areas.

According to the latest UNDP reports:

- 1.69 million people have been affected.
- The Flood affected area is about 123,000 hectares.
- Crop damaged is 94,700 hectares.
- 819 houses have been fully damaged.

Nepal

Heavy rains commenced several days ago widespread flooding and landslides have affected thousands of people in eastern and central regions. Sixteen out of 18 affected districts are situated in these regions, with the remaining two districts in the mid and far-western regions. Over 80,000 people have been affected in the flood-hit districts.

The death toll reported so far has reached 50 and primary assessments indicate significant destruction of infrastructure. Several districts in the southern Terai region have been submerged by water and people have moved to safer areas using schools and temples as shelters. In the hilly region landslides have started to occur and houses have been swept away resulting in casualties. Over 1200 houses have been completely destroyed and 1600 partially damaged. No signs of epidemics have been reported so far, but could be expected.

The heavy rains in these parts of the country may continue for a few more days according to the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology. The weather improved 12 July resulting in reduced water levels which helped to allow assessments to proceed and the commencement of distribution of relief material. The highways in the

eastern and central region have been damaged and the transportation link with the capital was interrupted for three days but has re-opened. Airlines have also suspended their flights as airports in the regions are still submerged under water.

The Government has started reaching the affected areas by helicopters and started distribution of dry foods, however the assistance needs to be expanded to all affected areas. The Nepal Red Cross district branches have been reaching the affected population with rescue and relief services.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

Bangladesh

Local Red Crescent Units along with community based disaster preparedness (CBDP) squad volunteers are assisting the affected people in moving to safer places. The Bangladesh Red Crescent and Federation jointly conducted a flood assessment mission from 27-30 June and as recommended by the assessment team have already distributed approximately 1000 family kits and BP5 biscuits in three districts (Habiganj, Moulvibazar(Sylhet) and Feni). The Rangamati Chittagong Hill Tracts Red Crescent Unit has also conducted an emergency relief operation in the remote Baghaichari sub-district following on the spot assessment and distributed 75 family kits and 10 cartons of BP5 biscuits among the most vulnerable affected people.

Two more joint National Society/Federation teams departed on 13 July to do further assessments in the north and west of Bangladesh. They are due to return at the end of the week.

Coordination: The Bangladesh Red Crescent/Federation Emergency Flood Task force met on 13 July and a Disaster Management coordination meeting with the Government agencies is scheduled for 15 July. The National Society with the support of the Federation is closely monitoring the situation. Close contact for better coordination and information sharing with international donors, embassies, UN agencies NGO's and government disaster and relief agencies is being maintained.

Needs: The Bangladesh Red Crescent is continuing to distribute family kits and BP5 biscuits from their current stocks. It is also drawing up a countrywide distribution plan based on the forthcoming assessment team report to activate World Food Programme/Government of Bangladesh rice allocation. A Memorandum of Understanding gives the Bangladesh Red Crescent free access to up to 1000 MT of rice for any emergency during any one year.

Further floods are anticipated as the Monsoon season gets into full swing, and numerous requests for assistance from district Units are coming in to NHQ. The Bangladesh Red Crescent needs to replenish and procure additional buffer stocks. Also modest funds will be required to meet transportation and distribution costs.

Media: There has been widespread media coverage in Bangladesh newspapers. Several Donor Embassies have contacted the Federation delegation for up-to-date appraisals of the flood situation and to arrange meetings.

India

The Bihar state branch has participated in rescue and relief operations along with the local authorities by providing the local government with trained volunteers and 60 boats. The Indian Red Cross state branch has provided the following relief items to date:

Type of assistance	Quantity
Beaten Rice	35 metric tons
Tarpaulin sheets	3000 sheets
Kitchen sheets	1500 sets
Men's clothing	2000 pieces
Women's clothing	4000 pieces
Assorted clothes	6000 pieces
Plastic Buckets	2500 pieces
Life Jackets to district branches	25 pieces

The Indian Red Cross Assam state branch along with district branches have mobilised trained volunteers to take up rescue operation of shifting stranded people in marooned areas to higher ground and providing food. In Nalbari and Goalpara the Indian Red Cross district volunteers are mobilising the community to use raised flood platforms (constructed by the National Society during 2002 under the disaster reduction programme funded by DFID).

The Indian Red Cross Assam state branch has also mobilised relief material consisting of food and non-food items. The individual districts have also mobilised the community to donate food and used utensils for the affected people. Assam state volunteers are working with the Inland Water Transport Department and the State Relief Department to rescue the marooned population. Indian Red Cross Assam state branch boats are being used in coordination with the State Government. The Assam state government has also provided financial assistance of Rs 300,000 to the Assam state branch, which has been utilised for providing relief goods to the affected people. The Indian Red Cross NHQ is releasing 10,000 tarpaulins (shelter material) for Bihar.

NHQ will deploy a team of up to five members from the national disaster response team who are highly trained disaster management cross-sectoral professionals in the latest assessment techniques for a rapid assessment of the flood affected districts in Bihar. NHQ is also arranging to send water purification tablets and water units.

Indian Red Cross NHQ has released the following relief items from their regional warehouse in Guwahati, which will be mobilised and handed over to the Assam state branch.

Type of assistance	Quantity
Kitchen sets	500
Plastic buckets	1000
Female clothing	3250
Male clothing	1250
Towel pieces	500
Cotton blankets	500
Plastic sheets	50

In addition a senior level team from Indian Red Cross NHQ is visiting Assam this week, in order to conduct a rapid assessment of the flood affected areas.

The Indian Red Cross Disaster Management team is on high alert along and the Disaster Management Centre is on 24 hour alert and keeping a constant vigil on the latest developments.

Coordination: An annual conference of secretaries and relief commissioners of States and Union territories was organised by the Ministry of Home Affairs, National Disaster Management Division on 3 July in order to discuss disaster preparedness, relief and response mechanisms. The Indian Red Cross was the only non-governmental agency to be included in the meeting.

Indian Red Cross is also in the process of drafting a disaster response strategy for the current monsoon season. The India Delegation and South Asia Regional Delegation of the Federation had a combined meeting on 23 April, reviewing procedures for disaster response, clarifying institutional roles and responsibilities.

Nepal

Due to difficulty in communication and transportation, the Nepal Red Cross has been able to receive up-to-date information from only some of the disaster affected districts on a regular basis. With many areas still submerged it has been difficult for the Nepal Red Cross to conduct an assessment of the situation and start planned relief distribution.

However, the National Society has been continuously monitoring the situation and involving its volunteers and staff in rescue and relief activities where possible. Though reports are yet to be received by NHQ from all affected districts, to date 278 families in six districts have been supported with food and non-food assistance.

The Nepal Red Cross has decided that it will focus in the coming days on immediate response with supply off food items purchased locally and water purification liquid. Districts have already taken initiatives to mobilize local resources and reach affected communities with food items. NHQ will be providing funds to each affected district to cover minimum costs for the above mentioned activities.

Due to the conflict situation in the country all components of the Red Cross Movement met to discuss the operation. Recommendations were sent to the districts to ensure proper sharing of information and coordination with government and other actors while pointing out the need for independence of the Nepal Red Cross in the actual operation.

At present, Nepal Red Cross warehouses have a full complement of relief stocks with the capacity of supporting 35,000 families. Relief materials had been pre-positioned in districts before the monsoon season and more material will be dispatched from regional warehouses in Birgunj and Biratnagar, when needed and the transport situation allows.

Coordination and information sharing is taking place at a national level with the Home Ministry as well as UNDP, WHO, USAID and other actors.

The Head of Regional Delegation South Asia was interviewed by Radio France (English language service) and Voice of America on 12 July. He gave an overview of the situation and outlined the Red Cross/Red Crescent response in the region.

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