

# ***BANGLADESH: TORNADOES***

*15 May 1996*

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***period covered: 13 May - 15 May***

A severe storm on Monday evening, 13 May, spawned violent tornadoes in central Bangladesh, some 70 kms north of the capital, Dhaka. The death toll had reached 403 as of this morning, local time, and is still climbing as the search and rescue operation continues. It is feared that the number of dead could reach 1,000. Local medical resources were overwhelmed by more than 33,000 injured victims, of whom some 5,000 have been hospitalised with serious injuries. Preliminary reports indicate that 25,000 homes were destroyed during the 20 minute ordeal, leaving well over 100,000 people without shelter from the heat and rain.

At the request of the Government, a joint Federation/Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) Assessment Team set out for the disaster area on Tuesday morning. The team was comprised of the Federation Head of Delegation and the Disaster Preparedness Delegate, and the Acting Chairman and the Deputy Secretary General of Disaster Response of the BDRCS. It decided to make its initial assessment in the Basail thana (area) which although at the tail end of the tornado was severely affected and therefore likely to accurately reflect the scale of the disaster.

On its arrival at Basail village, the team saw young police cadets recovering bodies and body parts from a school, a nearby swamp, and houses -- relieving family and friends of this gruesome task. The corrugated iron sheets used for the roofs of many homes were thrown about by the storm like giant razor blades, causing severe injuries and dismemberment.

Children playing in the school yard raced into the school when they saw the tornado approaching. The storm totally devastated the building, carrying a large chunk of concrete and steel beams over 100 metres away. The number of children killed is not yet known.

The tornado cut a swathe 0.5 km wide, destroying everything in its path. The village and immediate area, with a total population of approximately 4,000, suffered heavy losses. At the time of the assessment, 130 people were known to have died and bodies were being recovered at the rate of approximately 10 per hour, with estimates that up to 250 people had been killed. One-fourth of the villagers lost their homes. An estimated 300 had been transported to the medical clinic.

The Assessment Team met with the District Commissioner of Local Government and the Central Government Disaster Relief Commissioner and were given the following preliminary information, reflecting the situation as of 1600 hours local time yesterday in just six of the thanas in the area:

THANA	AFFECTED	KNOWN DEATHS	ESTIMATED INJURED	ESTIMATED HOUSES DESTROYED
Gopalpur 24 villages	22,000	99	1,000	8,850
Basail 17 villages	12,000	230	2,000	3,500
Kalihati 10 villages	14,000	59	600	3,500
Shakipur 2 villages	2,500	25	250	3,200
Mirzapur 2 villages	1,500	7	70	135
Ghafail 4 villages	500	1	10	140
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>62,500</b>	<b>421</b>	<b>3,930</b>	<b>19,350</b>

The BDRCS dispatched foodstuffs and three medical teams, each comprised of a doctor and three paramedics, to the area on Tuesday. The Delegation released CHF 10,000 for the immediate procurement of compressed rice and molasses to provide a high energy food source for those made extremely vulnerable by this storm.

The BDRCS and the Federation Delegation are currently preparing a Plan of Action for a relief operation that will initially focus on medical and shelter needs. A second Assessment Team has departed for the affected area, comprised of the Federation Cyclone Preparedness Delegate, BDRCS staff, and two local assistants to the Japanese Red Cross Society Bilateral Project. Further information will be provided as soon as it becomes available. It seems clear already that, while an appeal may not be warranted, some funds will be needed to support BDRCS relief efforts.

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