

BANGLADESH: TORNADOES

24 May 1996

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period covered: 17-24 May 1996

Latest events

The death toll resulting from the tornadoes that struck on 13 May 1996 in north-central Bangladesh, has reached 558 with hundreds still unaccounted for. The official Government statistics cite 19,990 families affected (98,550 people), 37,248 injured, 36,420 houses destroyed or damaged, and 6,787 head of livestock killed. Infected wounds, polluted wells, and lack of sanitary facilities add to other problems resulting from this sudden disaster. There are concerns that the death toll may rise as more bodies are recovered and others die of their injuries or secondary infections.

Stories of incredible human suffering are heard by the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society staff and volunteers, and Federation Delegates. The BDRCS staff and volunteers have been personally touched by the impact of the tornadoes - the Tracing Team discovered that the brother of a Unit member died at a hospital in Dhaka after his community was ravaged by the tornadoes. One of the Relief Co-ordinators was seriously injured in a road accident when returning home from the site of the operation.

The bizarre nature of tornadoes was illustrated yet again when it was reported that 200 cast iron tube wells were pulled out of the ground by the powerful winds.

Progress - Plan of action

Muster rolls are written and distribution is on-going. The BDRCS and the Federation Delegation have received a number of compliments about their swift response and organised operation. The operation has continued throughout the recent turmoil created when the President dismissed several top military leaders. Tanks, armoured personnel carriers and troops marched into Dhaka and other main cities causing concern over a new outbreak of hostilities. The crisis appears to be over but Bangladesh may again see politically based disruptions as the date of the general election on 12 June is approaching.

MEDICAL FIELD CLINICS:

The number of people lining up for treatment remains high. In just several hours, 250 people were seen by doctors at one of the medical field units. These numbers are expected to level off and then slowly decrease, but as for now they remain high.

FAMILY PARCELS:

Distribution of 60 metric tons of rice, 10 metric tons of dhal, 1,000 litres of cooking oil, 1,000 saris, and 800 longhis began in Tangail on 23 May. Additional rations and clothing are being prepared and will be distributed soon.

SHELTER:

Plastic sheeting, tarpaulins and 200 tents were distributed. These will provide temporary shelter to those most vulnerable to the elements.

FIRST AID KITS:

First aid kits are being stocked and replenished as numerous volunteers make themselves available to provide first aid to thousands requiring care.

PUBLIC AWARENESS AND FUND-RAISING :

The Public Awareness and Fund-raising Campaign is proving to be quite successful. In-kind donations have been received throughout Bangladesh. All BDRCS Units have been encouraged to participate in some way. The press releases have generated responses on the international level as well.

EXTERNAL RELATIONS:

The Federation Delegation and BDRCS continue to co-ordinate their activities with the Association of Development Agencies of Bangladesh. They also continue to liaise with the UN agencies, NGOs and Government officials.

BLOOD COLLECTION:

The BDRCS Blood Centre in Dhaka has collected needed blood for the hospitals in Tangail by sending its mobile team out into various communities and through its collection centre in Dhaka.

Other events

Tragedy struck again in Bangladesh on 23 May at 1600 hours GMT when a passenger ferry sank after colliding with a larger one on the Jamuna River approximately 100 km north of Dhaka (30 km north of Tangail). It is thought that over 150 people were on the ship when it went down but only 60 had been rescued as of 24 May. Eighteen people were taken to the hospital.

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