

BURMA - Fire

Date: April 2, 1985

Location: Rangoon

No. Dead: None reported

No. Affected: 50 injured, 4,000 homeless

Damage: Total value of destroyed property estimated at \$7.3 million

The Disaster

On the evening of April 2, a fire broke out in a low-income residential neighborhood in Rangoon. Fanned by strong winds, the fire spread quickly through the township of Mayango, destroying over 600 homes and buildings, including two Buddhist monasteries, two cooperative stores, the local People's Council office, and a government central telephone exchange. Although no loss of life was reported, approximately 50 people received injuries requiring medical attention.

While it did not match the Mandalay fire of 1984, this was the worst fire in Rangoon in 1985 and ranks as the second-largest fire in the city during the past ten years. Total damages were estimated at \$7.3 million; private property losses were set at \$350,000, while the value of the telephone exchange was reported as \$6.9 million. Burmese cities and towns are particularly vulnerable to fires during the February to May dry season due to the combination of hot, dry weather, congested urban areas, flammable construction materials for houses (primarily teak and bamboo with thatched roofs), and the widespread use of open fires and kerosene lamps. Often, private hoarding of kerosene and gasoline heightens the danger of fire.

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Action Taken by the Socialist Republic and the Union of Burma

Burmese authorities reacted quickly to the fire and to the immediate needs of the victims. Four temporary shelters were set up in nearby government schools and temples. Meals, medical care, and other necessities were provided to the homeless in the shelters. The Mayangon Township Disaster Coordinating Committee directed the relief activities.

Assistance Provided by the United States Government

On April 6, U.S. Ambassador Daniel A. O'Donohue determined that the Rangoon fire disaster warranted USG assistance. The Ambassador exercised his disaster assistance authority and presented the chairman of the Burma Red Cross Society with a check for \$18,371. This money was given to the Mayangon Township Disaster Coordinating Committee and cash contributions were distributed on a household basis for the immediate needs of the victims.

TOTAL \$18,371

Assistance Provided by U.S. Voluntary Agencies

None reported

Assistance Provided by the International Community

None reported