

## BANGLADESH - Cyclone and Tidal Waves

Date: May 25, 1985

Location: Coastal islands in the Bay of Bengal and the coastal belt of Noakhali, Cox's Bazar, Chittagong, Bhola, and Patuakhali districts

No. Dead: 10,000 official estimate (4,300 bodies recovered, 6,800 missing as of June 1985)

People Affected: 1.3 million

Damage: 102,000 homes destroyed; 35,000 homes partially damaged; 133,000 acres of crops damaged; 120,000 cattle killed. In the three districts of Chittagong, Noakhali, and Feni (70% of affected area) damage and losses to houses, embankments, livestock, and standing crops estimated at \$18.5 million.

### The Disaster

In the early morning hours of May 25, a cyclone struck the southern coast of Bangladesh from Patuakhali to Chittagong districts. Winds with gusts up to 161 km/hour generated tidal waves ranging from three meters to eight meters high which assaulted the low lying coast. Small islands recently created by silting in the Ganges River Delta were the hardest hit areas. Inhabited primarily by squatters, migratory laborers, and fishermen living in huts or small boats, these shifting islets known as "chars" were devastated by the tidal waves. Dwellings, together with their inhabitants, were swept into the sea by the force of the storm.

Heavy rains accompanying the cyclone caused severe flooding, particularly in the Camilla and Sylhet districts. In these areas, overflowing rivers forced at least 200,000 people to flee their homes and aggravated a severe drinking water shortage. The start of seasonal monsoon rains shortly after the cyclone added to the flooding and impeded relief efforts in the outlying areas.

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Accurate records of the number of people inhabiting the affected coastal areas at the time of the storm did not exist, partly because many were transient farmers who were not registered or counted by local authorities. Therefore it is difficult to estimate the number of people who may have perished.

### Action Taken by the Government of Bangladesh (BDG)

A satellite weather-alert system financed and built by the USG alerted the BDG to the approaching storm several days before the cyclone struck. Authorities in Dhaka issued warnings and began evacuating the threatened areas 24 hours in advance. Many inhabitants of the hardest hit islands did not respond to the final alert for immediate evacuation because they did not have access to radios or were reluctant to leave their homes and possessions behind.

General Ershad, President of Bangladesh, took charge of the relief efforts immediately after the storm. A full-scale search and rescue operation was launched using Navy and Air Force ships and helicopters. The Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh was appointed to coordinate disaster relief, rehabilitation planning, and information sharing. On a local level, district government authorities assessed damages and needs in affected areas. Fearing a cholera outbreak similar to one that occurred after the devastating 1970 cyclone, medical teams were sent to affected areas to administer cholera inoculations.

On May 28 and May 29 the BDG held a meeting of representatives of non-governmental agencies and PVOs and indicated that sufficient supplies of food and medicine were available in-country. However, cash donations were accepted by the President's Cyclone Disaster Relief Fund and the BDG External Resources Division. A grant of more than \$300,000 was established by the BDG as initial aid to victims.

During the first weeks following the disaster it became apparent that the devastating cyclone and tidal surge had created a need for emergency food relief for roughly 500,000 people. The BDG announced a plan for responding to the food needs of the survivors and asked the USG to release in-country stocks of wheat controlled by CARE. The food was diverted from development activities to support emergency feeding programs. The most seriously affected victims were provided with 2.7 kg of wheat per family per day, benefiting 17,000 families. A food-for-work program was mounted by the BDG to provide rations of just over 2.7 kg of wheat per laborer per day. For other marginal victims the BDG launched an Emergency Vulnerable Feeding Program (VGF) that distributed a ration of about 7.7 kg of wheat per recipient per week for three to five months. During that period, more than 50,000 families received VGF wheat.

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Assistance Provided by the United States Government

On May 27, in response to the BDG request for assistance, Ambassador Howard B. Schaffer issued a disaster declaration and promptly used his disaster assistance authority to obligate \$25,000 to the President's Cyclone Disaster Relief Fund. The donation was used to provide basic needs such as food, water, shelter, and other emergency assistance to cyclone victims.

The acting Director of USAID, Bill Joslin, and several other international representatives toured the most seriously affected areas on May 29. Based on the findings from that trip and a U.N. aerial survey on the previous day, Ambassador Schaffer recommended USAID donate an additional \$300,000.

The funds were made available through the U.S. Mission in Bangladesh to procure needed relief supplies locally and to provide other emergency assistance.

In disasters of this type and magnitude, major health problems due to waterborne disease often result. Over 2,000 new cases of acute diarrhea were reported during the two weeks following the onslaught of the storm. In an effort to prevent the possibility of a serious epidemic of infectious disease in the disaster areas, OFDA approved a grant of \$100,000 to the International Center for Diarrheal Disease Research to be used for improving the availability of its monitoring and treatment services to the cyclone victims.

The USG also recognized a definite need for emergency food distribution to the cyclone victims. In response to an official request from the BDG, the USG authorized CARE to release 10,000 MT of PL-480 Title II in-country wheat originally intended for a development-oriented food-for-work program. Commodities were valued at \$1,580,000 and ocean transport costs were \$700,000.

In response to an appeal by LRCS for \$2.2 million, OFDA authorized the Ambassador of the U.S. Mission in Geneva to execute a grant for \$200,000. Donations were used to provide emergency relief assistance to 240,000 people and to finance an aid rehabilitation program for 4,000 families.

Summary of USG Assistance

Ambassador's Authority donated to the BDG President's Cyclone  
Disaster Relief Fund.....\$25,000

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Cash through the U.S. Mission to procure relief supplies  
and provide other emergency relief assistance.....\$300,000

Grant to the International Center for Diarrheal Disease  
Research for monitoring and treatment of infectious disease.....\$100,000

Contribution to LRCS in response to their appeal.....\$200,000

Total OFDA assistance.....\$625,000

10,000 MT of P.L. 480 Title II commodities.....\$1,580,000

Freight cost.....\$700,000

Total FFP assistance.....\$2,280,000

Total USG assistance.....\$2,905,000

Assistance Provided by U.S. Voluntary Agencies

ADRA - gave a large quantity of clothing, value not reported.

ANRC - contributed \$150,000 to the LRCS appeal.

CARE - made an immediate cash contribution of \$2,500 from local resources to purchase water containers and clothing as well as tools for burials; sent an assessment team to review damages in Cox's Bazar area, Urir Char, and Sandwhip; and administered the distribution of in-country stocks of USG-donated food.

CRS - contributed \$25,000 in cash to Caritas Bangladesh.

CWS - provided \$5,000 in cash and supplied 500,000 water purifying tablets, value not reported.

SCF/US - contributed \$10,000 through its local office and launched an appeal for donations.

WVRO - gave \$50,000 for food, supplies, and shelter.

TOTAL \$242,500

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### Assistance Provided by the International Community

#### International Organizations

EEC - contributed \$375,000 in cash for food, medical aid, and clothing through MSF and LRCS.

LRCS - issued an appeal on behalf of the Bangladesh Red Cross for \$2.3 million.

OPEC Fund for International Development - contributed \$100,000 for medicine and other emergency materials.

UNDP - gave an emergency grant of \$30,000.

UNDRO - gave an emergency grant of \$30,000.

UNICEF - sent a representative of the U.N. Inter-Agency Disaster Team for on-site assessment.

WCC - provided \$30,000 in cash through the Christian Commission for Development, Bangladesh.

WFP - provided 2,600 MT of wheat for the Vulnerable Group Feeding Program valued at \$546,000.

WHO - gave an emergency kit and medicine for diarrhea control, valued at \$3,850.

#### Governments

Australia - contributed \$70,422 to the Bangladesh Red Cross, \$70,422 through Australian NGOs working in Bangladesh, and gave a cash grant of \$64,433 through LRCS.

Belgium - relief items through Freres des Hommes valued at \$16,129.

Canada - contributed \$147,060 in cash through the Canadian Red Cross; \$20,000 through its embassy in Bangladesh; and local personnel support from a CIDA/CARE rural maintenance project.

China, People's Rep. - \$50,000 in cash through the Bangladesh Red Cross

Denmark - \$13,794 in cash through LRCS

Germany, Fed. Rep. - \$132,235 in cash through LRCS, and 20 outboard motors valued at \$16,129

Finland - \$111,176 in cash in response to the LRCS appeal

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France - \$52,632 in cash, and 3 MT of protein biscuits, value not reported

India - contributed food, helicopters, other humanitarian aid, and \$755,857 in cash. Private individuals gave an additional \$1,890.

Ireland - \$10,000 in cash for emergency relief and \$20,000 for rehabilitation

Italy - cash grant and emergency relief supplies valued at \$197,044; 40 MT of medicines, disinfectant and food for children, all valued at \$394,088

Japan - \$1.2 million in cash; and members of the Japan Lower House contributed \$4,000.

Netherlands - \$144,700 in cash

New Zealand - \$25,649 in cash through LRCS

Norway - \$113,725 in cash through LRCS; and \$55,555 through other NGOs

Pakistan - donated relief goods valued at \$632,511 and \$632 in cash.

Saudi Arabia - \$4 million in cash plus 30,000 MT of wheat, 5,000 food parcels, 30 MT of medical supplies, and 12,000 parcels of tents and blankets; value not reported

Singapore - contributed 100,000 bottles of edible oil, value not reported.

Sweden - \$149,588 in cash through LRCS and \$1.1 million through the Swedish International Development Authority

Switzerland - \$768,000 in cash through NGOs

Thailand - contributed 500 MT of rice, value not reported.

United Kingdom - \$62,500 in cash through Oxfam (see Voluntary Organizations below, Oxfam)

Voluntary Organizations

Australia Catholic Relief - donated \$13,160 in cash through Caritas Bangladesh.

Australia Red Cross - \$40,023 in cash through LRCS

Austria Red Cross - \$47,059 in cash through LRCS

Belgium Red Cross - \$1,614 in cash through LRCS

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Canada Red Cross - \$118,678 in cash through LRCS

China, People's Rep., Red Cross - \$50,882 in cash through Bangladesh Red Cross

Cardinal Ledger and His Works, Canada - \$7,600 in cash

Caritas Australia - \$41,500 in cash

Caritas Austria - \$10,000 in cash

Caritas Canada - \$770 in cash

Caritas Belgium - \$10,000 in cash

Caritas England - \$23,200 in cash

Caritas France - \$51,900 in cash

Caritas Germany, Fed. Rep. - \$95,250 in cash

Caritas Italy - \$50,000 in cash

Caritas Japan - \$19,900 in cash

Caritas Netherlands - \$253,170 in cash

Caritas Spain - \$15,000 in cash

Caritas Switzerland - \$38,540 in cash

Catholic Fund For Overseas Development (CAFOD) - \$92,800 in cash

Czechoslovakia Red Cross - \$23,669 in cash through LRCS

Development et Paix, Canada - \$22,800 in cash

Denmark Red Cross - \$45,455 in cash through LRCS

Finland Red Cross - \$78,431 in cash through LRCS

France Red Cross - \$52,392 in cash through LRCS

Germany, Fed. Rep., Red Cross - \$96,774 in cash through LRCS

Greece Red Cross - donated one MT of pharmaceutical material, value not reported.

Hungary Red Cross - medicine valued at \$19,745

Iceland Red Cross - \$1,961 in cash through LRCS

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India Red Cross - \$45,882 in cash through LRCS

Indonesia Red Cross - \$1,961 in cash through LRCS

Ireland Red Cross - \$51,373 in cash

Italy Red Cross - \$5,180 in cash through LRCS

Japan Red Cross - gave cash, sheets, and clothing valued at \$257,408.

Korea, Rep. of, Red Cross - \$5,039 in cash through LRCS

Kuwait Red Crescent - \$6,809 in cash through LRCS

Liechtenstein Red Cross - \$9,137 in cash through LRCS

Malaysia Muslim Missionary Organization - \$20,000 in cash

Monaco Red Cross - \$2,468 in cash through LRCS

Muslim Welfare Organization of Malaysia - contributed \$4,040 in cash.

Netherlands Red Cross - \$80,537 in cash through LRCS

New Zealand Red Cross - \$6,224 in cash through LRCS

Norway Red Cross - \$27,777 in cash through LRCS

Oxfam/UK - provided relief supplies valued at \$11,227; contributed \$62,500 (donated by the U.K. government) to a joint relief and rehabilitation program with SCF/UK; and provided shelter for 1,000 families valued at \$105,300, in conjunction with SCF/UK.

Qatar Red Crescent - \$4,961 in cash through LRCS

SCF/UK - contributed \$62,500 to a joint relief and rehabilitation program with Oxfam/UK and participated in a shelter project in conjunction with Oxfam.

Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund - donated \$10,000 in cash.

The Shipbuilding Foundation Ryakhi Sasakana (Japan) - donated \$40,000 in cash.

Soviet Union Red Cross - donated 5,000 meters of cloth, 100 tents, and 600 blankets through the Bangladesh Red Cross; value not reported.

Spain Red Cross - \$10,176 in cash through LRCS

Sweden Red Cross - \$73,633 in cash through LRCS



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Switzerland Red Cross - \$39,216 in cash through LRCS

Thailand Red Cross - \$1,091 in cash through LRCS

Turkey Red Cross - \$10,176 in cash through Bangladesh Red Cross

United Kingdom Red Cross - \$129,167 in cash

TOTAL      \$13,858,576