

# 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

## BANGLADESH: TENSION IN THE HILL TRACTS

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### In Brief

This document is being issued for information only. The Federation is not seeking any funding or other assistance from donors for this operation at this time. However, contributions are encouraged and welcome to support the Federation's 2003 Appeal for Bangladesh (no. 01.53/2003), which includes long-term programmes for the Chittagong Hills Tracts; village health, water/sanitation and income generation designed according to Better Programming Initiative (BPI).

### The Situation

On 26 August 2003, in the remote Upazila<sup>1</sup> of Mahalchhari of Khagrachori District in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, violent clashes occurred between two groups involving indigenous tribal people and Bengali settlers over the abduction of a local businessman. As a direct consequence of this incident, one person was killed and more than 10 people wounded. More than 1,500 people (575 families) have been affected. Some 274 houses and three Buddhist temples were ransacked and one burned to the ground.



More than 270 houses were burned to the ground in the clash

Army and police personnel were rapidly deployed in the raided villages of Babupara, Lemuchhara, Basantapara, Keranginal, Durpajanal, Pahartali, Sawmill Para and Ramessu Kabari Para, in order to stabilize the situation and reduce tensions. A ban on movement of foreigners and the civilians in the region was enforced. Although the ban was lifted on 5 September, the army and police have continued their vigilance and routine patrols in the highly sensitive areas to ensure peace and security for the population.

The army provided emergency food assistance consisting of cooked food and dry rations for several days, distribution of clothing, financial assistance of Tk 2,000 per family (approximately CHF 47) and supply of tents for temporary shelter.

In their efforts to further assist the affected population, the army is helping the local population to rebuild the Buddhist temple by providing supplies and building materials. The Khagrachori district authorities have also provided limited assistance to 177 families with 5 kg of rice, matches and candles.

<sup>1</sup> Administrative Unit – i.e.: Municipality

On 8 September, an inter-parliamentary committee from Dhaka visited the most affected areas. According to local media, the Prime-Minister's Office is planning to allocate Tk. 3 million (approx. CHF 70,000) for the rehabilitation of the victims.

The Federation's Delegation maintained close contact with the UNDP representative in Bangladesh, as the UNDP expressed its willingness to assist (if required) in providing financial support for three months food distribution and supply of traditional building materials.

## **Red Cross and Red Crescent action**

The Federation Delegation and the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) headquarters have been in frequent contact with Khagrachori district unit receiving daily information on new developments in the hill tracts. Once the ban on movement to the Chittagong Hill Tracts was lifted the BDRCS field unit carried out a rapid assessment in the most affected villages. Based upon Khagrachori Unit's assessment, the BDRCS headquarters decided to dispatch emergency food and non-food relief items from its buffer stocks at the central warehouse in Dhaka.

A total of 300 families were provided with a family kit (consisting of sari and lungi, cooking pots, plates, spoons, candles, plastic buckets, washing soap, plastic sheeting etc.), 1 kg of HPB (high protein biscuit) and 1 kg of dates.



Distribution of relief items to the affected families in the Khagrachori districts

As the movement in the area where the incident took place is still restricted and special permission needs to be obtained from the government to visit the area, the Federation Head of Delegation and the BDRCS Chairman approached the government with a request to visit the affected areas and oversee the distribution. The distribution was successfully carried out without any security incidents.

The BDRCS has been working in the Hill Tracts region for the last four years with its main focus given to the village health programmes, water/sanitation and income generation projects.

At this stage there is no need for external assistance.

For a full description of the National Society profile, see [www.ifrc.org](http://www.ifrc.org)

*For further details please contact:*

- *The Bangladesh Red Crescent National Society in Dhaka; Phone + 880 2 9330188; Fax + 880 2 9352303; e-mail: [bdrcs@bdonline.com](mailto:bdrcs@bdonline.com)*
- *Ewa Eriksson, Desk Officer in Geneva, Phone; +41 22 730 4252; e-mail: [ewa.eriksson@ifrc.org](mailto:ewa.eriksson@ifrc.org)*
- *IFRC Delegation in Bangladesh; Tony Maryon, HOD, Tel; + 880 2 831 5401; Fax; + 880 2 934 1631; e-mail: [ifrcbd03@ifrc.org](mailto:ifrcbd03@ifrc.org)*

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For longer-term programmes, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal.