

FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE INDO-PAKISTAN CONFLICT VICTIMS

Red Cross action is continuing in the Indian sub-continent :

In India and Pakistan

Visits to prisoners and internees

ICRC delegates in India and in Pakistan are working to help prisoners of war in accordance with the provisions of the Third Geneva Convention.

In Pakistan, since early 1972, they have paid fifteen visits to Indian prisoners of war in a camp at Lyallpur, a camp and two hospitals at Rawalpindi, and hospitals at Lahore, Hyderabad, Okara and Kharian.

In India, there are about 90,000 prisoners of war in some 40 camps in the Ganges Basin. Since arriving in India, ICRC delegates had by the end of March already visited about 15,000 prisoners at Bareilly (4 camps), Faizabad (2 camps), Amballa and Ranchi, as well as in hospitals in Bareilly and Mildery. These visits are continuing. The ICRC delegates have also visited nearly 2,500 Pakistani civilians who, being in India at the time of hostilities, have been interned in camps at Allahabad, Visapur and Bareilly. These persons are protected by the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Mail and relief supplies

The ICRC is being used more and more as an intermediary. More than 300,000 civilian family messages have passed through the Central Tracing Agency in Geneva, and several tens of thousands of messages are sent direct each week. Furthermore, the ICRC recently received 5,000 answers which will open the way to a regular exchange of letters among dispersed families. Pakistani and Indian

prisoners of war have already written several tens of thousands of letters to their families in their respective countries. This mail is sent direct from one country to the other or exchanged when ICRC delegates in Pakistan and India meet at Wagah, on the frontier between the two countries.

As mentioned in last month's *International Review*, the first meeting took place on 22 February. On that occasion, 650 parcels for Indian prisoners of war in Pakistan and 2,000 parcels for Pakistani prisoners of war in India were exchanged.¹ These standard parcels of foodstuffs and clothing had been prepared by the Indian and Pakistani National Red Cross Societies for their nationals.

In Bangladesh

Relief is still being brought to the civilians, with the generous and effective aid of National Societies.

Surgical units

The surgical aspect is now fast returning to normal and the emergency period requiring the presence of Red Cross surgical teams in the various parts of the country has now drawn to a close. Local doctors give post-operative treatment in the twenty-odd hospitals which have resumed full activity around the country.

Consequently, the surgical units sent by the National Red Cross Societies of Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, which had been working respectively at Chuadanga, Khulna, Mirzapur and Dacca, left Bangladesh in March and were not replaced.

In one specific field, however, specialized assistance is necessary, and that is the supply of artificial limbs for the disabled. The Holy Family Hospital in Dacca, run by the local Red Cross, assisted by the Swiss Red Cross, is used particularly for this. The Swiss Red Cross is currently studying the possibility of setting up an artificial limb workshop, and the Danish Red Cross has already sent two physiotherapists.

¹ *Plate.*

Medico-social teams

On the other hand, the thirteen socio-medical teams, also supplied by National Red Cross Societies, will continue their work throughout the country. In all there are 61 people: four *Swedes* at Mymensingh, five *Finns* at Dinajpur, four *Danes* at Khulna, five *Norwegians* at Rajshahi, four *French* at Comilla/Sylhet, four *Spaniards* also at Comilla/Sylhet, five *Japanese* at Hatia, eleven *West Germans* at Dacca and Pabna, five *British* at Saidpur, five *Belgians* at Madaripur, five *Canadians* at Saidpur and four *New Zealanders* at Nilphamari.

These teams have two very important jobs to do: they distribute supplies (foodstuffs and blankets) to the villagers in their respective areas and they give the civilian population out-patient treatment and help with mass vaccination sessions. In this way, for example, the Belgian Red Cross team vaccinated 3,000 people against smallpox in the Madaripur region in early March with the help of the local health authorities. The supplies distributed during March, totalling more than 6,000 tons, consisted in the main of blankets, clothing, cereals (rice, wheat), high protein foods, powdered milk and baby food.

The distribution of these supplies is sometimes slower than expected, owing to the difficulties of moving both men and merchandise. However, the ICRC has two DC-6 planes, provided by the Swiss Government, which are to be used for transporting stocks from Chittagong to the hinterland and from Calcutta to Bangladesh. New Zealand has offered the services of a Hercules C-130 plane until the end of April for similar transport operations. Furthermore, the ICRC has the use of three helicopters, two provided by the Federal Republic of Germany and one by Sweden, and these are used specially for moving teams and medicaments which are much less bulky than other supplies.

Each team has several vehicles in its area. The full ICRC fleet consists of 55 lorries of which 34 were provided by the United Nations, 16 by the German Red Cross in the Federal Republic and 5 by the League; 34 cars and Land-Rovers, some supplied by the UN; 30 ambulances, a gift from the German Red Cross in the Federal Republic, and 7 motorboats.

The goods distributed are provided in the form of gifts or loans by organizations such as the United Nations, UNICEF, the Catholic Relief Services, the European Economic Community, and by many National Red Cross Societies.

Administrative staff and ICRC delegates at the end of March

All this requires a large technical and administrative staff (70 persons from Red Cross Societies in 12 countries and the League of Red Cross Societies). There were 37 ICRC delegates in Bangladesh and 2 at Calcutta (apart from the 9 delegates in New Delhi and the 6 in Islamabad who are discharging the ICRC's treaty obligations).

Financing

To finance its relief work in Bangladesh, the ICRC has launched an appeal to National Red Cross Societies and has approached a number of governments.

By 15 March 1972, the ICRC had received cash gifts for a total of about 6 million Swiss francs from the governments of Belgium, Canada, Great Britain, Norway and Switzerland, and from the following 16 National Societies: Australia, Canada, Cyprus, Federal Republic of Germany, France, Great Britain, Iceland, Ireland, Japan, Liechtenstein, Netherlands, New Zealand, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States, as well as from the League of Red Cross Societies and other organizations.

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After this account of recent events, we think a narrative sent to us by an ICRC delegate may be of interest. It concerns the first operation for the repatriation of Indian and Pakistani seriously wounded prisoners of war, which we mentioned in our last issue and which took place on 25 February.

The operation was carefully calculated and planned. A DC-6 aircraft flying for the International Red Cross was to leave New Delhi at 07.30 GMT and to repatriate twenty-seven seriously wounded Pakistani prisoners of war. Another DC-6, bearing the red cross emblem, was to leave Rawalpindi at the same time and

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bring back to India seventeen seriously wounded prisoners of war. Thus between the two hostile countries the first mutual concession following the war was about to materialize. But in India the plane did not take off at the scheduled time because one of its engines broke down.

To carry out this humanitarian operation for the exchange of the seriously wounded, the ICRC delegates in New Delhi and in Rawalpindi had had to act successively as strategists, accountants, jurists, travel agents and lawyers. In Pakistan and in India, they had secured concessions and wrested compromise agreements for the enemy prisoners. Eventually the foes of yesterday say "yes" to that which draws them together. And suddenly, without losing a minute, the plan must be stopped. Explanations must be given, persuasion must be used. In New Delhi and Rawalpindi, the operation is postponed for twenty-four hours.

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On the following morning, the ICRC delegates once more go over the plan for the operation, point by point. Others do the same in New Delhi and Rawalpindi. The repatriation of prisoners of war is a peace manoeuvre conducted like a war operation. And then, all of a sudden, the telephone brings a devastating announcement from the airport: the plane will not be ready in time. Again telephone calls have to be made. Radio messages must be broadcast, misgivings dispelled, and matters explained across frontiers.

At 15.30, everyone is on the airfield. Newspapermen too, who have been waiting since early morning, as they did yesterday. But, above all, lying in army hospital cots, are the captives, forty-four men whose bodies are maimed and who still hope to be among their own people that very evening.

As the sun sets on the horizon, something at last seems to be happening. On the opposite side of the airfield, an aircraft bearing the red cross is outlined against the sky. Then again nothing happens. The waiting goes on while shadows gradually lengthen.

At 18.00, the four engines are at least in running order! The plane is still on the ground, but suddenly it advances, turns and proceeds to the tarmac. Two minutes later, it is ready to receive the wounded. A telephone call is put through to the hospital, and within twenty minutes ambulances bring their passengers to the aircraft. And then there is yet another telephone call: the plane from Rawalpindi has not waited; it is due to arrive in half an hour!

REPATRIATION OF WOUNDED PRISONERS



Photo J. J. Kurz/ICRC

Severely wounded Indian and Pakistani prisoners of war are flown back home to their respective countries on ICRC aircraft.



Photo J. J. Kurz/ICRC

Arrival in New Delhi of severely wounded Indian prisoners of war, repatriated from Pakistan.

On the border between India and Pakistan: under the auspices of the ICRC, the Indian and Pakistan Red Cross Societies exchange gift parcels for their respective prisoners of war.



In Rawalpindi, the head of the ICRC delegation has realized that something must be done at any price before doubts set in. Inside the aircraft, seriously wounded men have been waiting long enough, on uncomfortable stretchers. So he simply offers himself as surety for the success of the operation. The Red Cross DC-6 aircraft takes off into the Pakistani sky and follows the special route (because anti-aircraft guns are always on the alert along the frontier). And when the pilot announces that the plane is flying in the Indian air space, the seventeen wounded men, who will henceforth be free, weep for joy! And so it is that at 19.00, the aircraft which should have crossed in the sky, are both standing on a New Delhi airfield.

Ambulances drive up. Supported by nurses, under the glare of projectors and the flash of bulbs, the first prisoners of war wrapped in dressing-gowns and blankets, pale and unsmiling, step forward as in a dream. The others follow on stretchers, with blankets that conceal and protect mutilated bodies racked by pain. Only the head is visible: a black moustache under dark and restless eyes. Then the aircraft door is closed on them, the propellers roar, the DC-6 at last moves towards the tarmac.

Meanwhile, fifty metres away, other wounded men are being removed from the aircraft which has come from Pakistan. There are the same flashes and projectors, but this time they light up immense smiles, a joy which for a while overcomes and dims bodily suffering.¹

Only yesterday these men were enemies. Today they resemble one another: those who have just left and those who have just arrived are men who share the same physical suffering, the same hope and the same relief at joining their own people.

The ICRC delegates have left almost immediately. As far as they are concerned, the first step has been taken: a bond of confidence has been restored between enemies. They have lived through hours of tension and uncertainty. All that effort, all that planning, for forty-four men! But one would need to have seen those men weep for joy to realize how worth while it all was, for this was the first repatriation operation opening the door to freedom for hundreds of other wounded prisoners of war.

¹ *Plate.*