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Asian sub-continent

In the Asian sub-continent, the ICRC continued the action, undertaken since the December 1971 war, for prisoners of war, civilian internees and civilian minorities on either side. Following the signing of the New Delhi Agreement between India and Pakistan, on 28 August 1973, it lent assistance in the repatriation of persons covered by the Agreement.

In order to ensure the effective execution of its various tasks, the ICRC maintained delegations at Islamabad, New Delhi and Dacca. The number of persons assigned to the ICRC action in the Asian sub-continent, at headquarters and in the field, amounted to fifty-eight during the first half of 1973. In the second half of the year, it rose to seventy-six as a result of further activities incumbent on the ICRC under the New Delhi Agreement. These figures do not include several hundred locally recruited personnel mainly assigned to the Central Tracing Agency's bureaux in the three countries.

The ICRC delegate-general for Asia and Oceania and the officer responsible for the Asian sub-continent carried out several missions to Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, to confer with the authorities on problems which were in abeyance and to co-ordinate the activities of the three ICRC delegations, and, after 28 August, to make arrangements required as a result of the New Delhi Agreement.

During the second half of 1973, the ICRC appealed to several Governments, National Societies and other organizations for funds to enable it to continue its action in the Asian sub-continent. The result of the appeal, plus other contributions received, ensured the financing of operations up to the end of 1973.

PRISONERS OF WAR

India

Visits: ICRC visits to internment camps, which had been suspended in January by the Indian authorities, were resumed early in February and continued normally until the end of December 1973. During the year, 197 visits were made to forty-nine camps holding some 73,000 prisoners of war and 17,000 civilian internees.

Four special visits were made following various incidents and attempts to escape, in which some prisoners had been wounded or killed. The ICRC pointed out to the Indian authorities that prolonged captivity was the cause of growing tension among the prisoners.

Each visit was covered by a report which the ICRC sent to the detaining power and to the prisoners' own government.

Material assistance: On the occasion of each visit, the ICRC delegates provided the prisoners with relief items such as books, games and sports items, and, as prescribed by camp doctors, special medicaments and several hundred pairs of spectacles.

Three tons of powdered milk donated by the Indian Red Cross were distributed to children, women and old people in the camps. The ICRC, for its part, financed the distribution of a fresh fruit a day to more than 4,500 child internees. The distribution was carried out in co-operation with local sections of the Indian Red Cross.

The ICRC and the Pakistan Red Cross also provided school equipment for schools in the camps.

*Repatriation:*¹ Contrary to the provisions of Article 118 of the Third Geneva Convention of 1949 and Article 133 of the Fourth Convention, the Indian Government maintained that without the agreement of the Government of Bangladesh no decision could be taken regarding general repatriation of Pakistani prisoners of war and civilian internees held in India inasmuch as they had surrendered to the joint command of the armed forces of India and Bangladesh. The deadlock ended with the conclusion, on 28 August 1973, of the New Delhi Agreement between the Governments of India and Pakistan, endorsed by the Government of Bangladesh.

Before the Agreement was concluded, the ICRC nonetheless continued its approaches and called upon the Indian Government to give priority to the repatriation of the wounded and the sick, and between 19 February and 15 September 1973, in six repatriation operations, carried out under the auspices of the ICRC, 807 Pakistani prisoners of war and internees were able to return home. They were conveyed by rail as far as the Wagah frontier post, with the

¹ Before the New Delhi Agreement of 28 August 1973. The repatriation operations conducted under that agreement are mentioned on pages 25 ff.

exception of a Pakistani officer who on 5 April was repatriated by a regular flight to Karachi.

Pakistan

The last Indian prisoner of war, who was hospitalized and therefore unable to return with his fellow prisoners on 1 December 1972, was repatriated on 12 January 1973. This ended ICRC action on behalf of prisoners of war in Pakistan.

Merchant seamen: In January 1973, the ICRC delegation at Islamabad had access to four prisons holding seventy-nine Indian merchant seamen. They were repatriated under the auspices of the ICRC on 10 March, and 154 seamen and 102 passengers travelling on a Pakistan ship, who had been retained in India, returned to their own country at the same time. Neither the Indian Government nor the Pakistan Government recognized the prisoner-of-war status to which the seamen were entitled under Article 4 of the Third Geneva Convention.

Bangladesh

ICRC delegates made seven visits to the seventy-five Pakistani prisoners of war held in the Dacca central prison. During the visits they distributed relief items such as medicaments, food, cigarettes, toilet articles, games and newspapers. The ICRC secured the release of a sick prisoner and arranged for him to be repatriated on 22 June. The remaining seventy-four were repatriated between 19 September and 10 October, following the New Delhi Agreement.

CIVILIAN MINORITIES

Non-locals in Bangladesh

The ICRC delegation at Dacca continued its activities on behalf of the non-local communities in Bangladesh.

Food supplies: The delegates ascertained that the 33,000 tons of foodstuffs, principally wheat, which the Government of Bangladesh had supplied to the National Society¹ were regularly received by

¹ The Bangladesh Red Cross Society was recognized by the ICRC on 20 September 1973.

the non-local communities. The delegates helped to solve some logistic problems.

In the more needy settlements, the ICRC endeavoured to supplement the wheat distribution with additional food. From UNICEF and other organizations, it obtained 366 tons of powdered milk, 1,700 tons of CSM (corn, soya and milk) and 3 tons of baby foods. These supplies were distributed under the auspices of the ICRC by local employees or voluntary organizations working in the settlements.

Housing: The ICRC continued its programme of constructing bamboo shelters for the homeless. In 1973, the programme, directed by an architect-delegate, rehoused 16,000 families or about 90,000 persons in 9,800 new or reconditioned constructions. More than 7.5 km of drain pipes were laid, and 450 latrines and 70 water pumps were installed.

The ICRC also constructed six anti-scabies centres, eight distribution centres, three maternity homes, five dispensaries and eight workshops. Expenditure on this construction work amounted to approximately half a million Swiss francs.

For several months, a thousand Bengalis and non-locals worked under the programme. The Government of Bangladesh participated by providing the architect-delegate with 1,800 corrugated iron sheets and enabling him to purchase bricks and 50 tons of cement from its own stocks.

In addition to a large financial contribution, the "Brot für die Welt" organization provided 57,000 m² of plastic.

Health: the ICRC's medico-social action mainly centered on care for under-nourished children and persons suffering from scabies. Twenty-two paid experts and 180 volunteers worked in the sixteen ICRC dispensaries (which were gradually taken over by other organizations and by the Government), where a monthly average of 112,000 persons received treatment. In addition to the dispensaries there were five maternity homes and seven anti-scabies centres.

Under the responsibility of the ICRC doctor-delegate, local doctors distributed approximately 200,000 francs' worth of medicaments received from UNICEF, the League of Red Cross Societies

and other sources. UNICEF also provided sixteen sets of basic equipment for dispensaries.

As regards hygiene, the ICRC supplied some six tons of soap as well as disinfectants and insecticides.

It also distributed clothing and blankets received locally from various organizations.

Schools and workshops: To promote the integration of the non-local communities, the ICRC opened schools at which non-locals could learn the Bengali language. The schools, attended by thousands of children and adults, are gradually being taken over by organizations such as CONCERN, while UNICEF and the Mennonite Central Committee have lent the scheme support by supplying school equipment.

In addition, to help non-locals meet their own needs, the ICRC started a number of projects ranging from a model farm to weaving, shoe-making and leather goods.

Bengali minorities in Pakistan

The ICRC delegation at Islamabad continued its action for Bengali minorities, both as regards protection and assistance. In a general way, it lent its good offices to Bengalis who encountered difficulties in their relations with the local Pakistani authorities.

Visits to repatriation centres: The delegates made fifty-seven visits to thirty-five repatriation centres where some 54,000 Bengalis—army men and their families and former senior officials—were interned.

The ICRC supplied relief items for child internees, especially powdered milk donated by the Swiss Government, and school equipment.

Visits to Bengali civilian detainees: Thirty-five visits were made to Bengali detainees in twenty-eight prisons.

The Government of Pakistan decided to release all Bengalis who had been arrested for attempting to leave the country illegally. The ICRC provided a modest allowance for all those released, most of whom had no money when they left prison.

The visits to repatriation centres and prisons were covered by reports which the ICRC sent to the Governments of Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Assistance to Bengali communities: Besides assistance in kind—clothing, food and medicaments—the ICRC provided financial aid for the more needy Bengali families, through the Bengali Repatriation and Welfare Committees at Islamabad, Lahore and Peshawar.

In the province of Sind, the ICRC undertook the financing of a Free Medical Scheme instituted by a group of Bengali doctors. In the Karachi settlements, it arranged for the distribution of five tons of powdered milk donated by the Swiss Government and a UNICEF donation of 5,000 bags of CSM (corn, soya and milk).

Negotiations for the repatriation or transfer of civilians between Pakistan and Bangladesh¹

During the first eight months of 1973, the ICRC delegation at Islamabad continued its approaches to the Pakistani authorities in order to ensure priority for the repatriation of Bengali civilians or army men in particular distress. Eighty-one servicemen and their families and 3,640 civilians were thus reunited with their relatives in Bangladesh, even before the start of repatriation operations under the New Delhi Agreement.

The ICRC delegation at Dacca, for its part, continued to register Pakistani nationals and the needy families of Pakistani prisoners of war or of civilian internees for transfer to Pakistan. By the end of May 1973, approximately 28,000 applications had been submitted to the Governments of Pakistan and Bangladesh. Although several hundred Pakistan entry visas were issued, it was only after the New Delhi Agreement that repatriation could take place.

ACTIVITIES OF THE CENTRAL TRACING AGENCY

In Pakistan: The Agency's bureau at Islamabad forwarded family messages from Bangladesh and India to the Pakistan National Society, which relayed them to the addressees. It also transmitted family messages to Pakistani prisoners of war and civilian internees

¹ Before the New Delhi Agreement of 28 August 1973.

in India and to the families of Bengali soldiers or civilians in Bangladesh. Lastly, the bureau initiated about a hundred inquiries a month regarding missing Bengali servicemen or civilians.

In India: In 1973, approximately ten million family messages between Pakistani prisoners of war or civilian internees in India and their families in Pakistan passed through the Agency's New Delhi bureau, which also opened inquiries regarding missing persons. On more than 14,000 occasions it transferred funds to prisoners of war or civilian internees.

In addition, the ICRC forwarded parcels prepared by the Red Cross and Pakistani families for prisoners in India. Nine such operations took place at the Wagah frontier station, where the Pakistan Red Cross handed over to the Indian Red Cross more than 180,000 parcels.

In Bangladesh: As the Central Tracing Agency was the sole means of communication for dispersed families, the Agency's offices in Bangladesh distributed family message forms in post offices and among non-local communities. Three air companies provided free transport of bags containing messages between Bangladesh and Pakistan via India.

The Agency's Dacca office dealt on average with more than 3,000 messages a day and opened about twenty inquiries about missing persons.

In Geneva: By the end of 1973 more than 500,000 index cards had been filed in the Indian, Pakistani and Bengali card indexes at the Central Tracing Agency's headquarters.

ICRC ACTIVITIES UNDER THE NEW DELHI AGREEMENT

To bring the repatriation operations governed by the New Delhi Agreement of 28 August 1973 to a successful conclusion, the Governments of Pakistan, India and Bangladesh requested the assistance of the Swiss Government, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and the ICRC. In September, ICRC representatives went to the three countries to clarify with the competent authorities the tasks of the ICRC as described below.

In India: ICRC delegates escorted Pakistani prisoners of war and civilian internees on their train journey to the frontier, where they supervised the actual repatriation. Each operation was covered by a report which the ICRC sent to the Indian and Pakistan Governments. From 28 September to 31 December, forty-three trains carried 27,217 prisoners of war and 11,104 civilian internees.

Before leaving the internment camps, the prisoners completed individual repatriation cards which were filed in the Pakistan card index of the Central Tracing Agency at Geneva.

During the repatriation operations, the ICRC delegates continued their visits to internment camps in India.

In Pakistan: The Central Tracing Agency's bureaux in different parts of the country registered Bengali civilians who wished to go to Bangladesh. Army men had already been registered by the Pakistan Government. By 31 December, 74,246 Bengali civilians and 52,078 soldiers (including families) had been registered. The ICRC submitted their applications for entry visas to the Government of Bangladesh.

Once visas were obtained, those concerned received an ICRC ad hoc identity document which was surrendered on arrival in Bangladesh and sent to the Central Tracing Agency in Geneva, which also received the repatriation card issued for each case, for filing in its Bengali card index.

In addition, the ICRC delegates aided the local authorities responsible for arranging the repatriation of the Bengali minority: assembly and transport to transit and departure camps. A sub-delegation was therefore established at Lahore, and the Karachi delegation was reinforced. In the departure camps near the airports of those two towns, delegates issued ICRC ad hoc identity documents to those leaving for Bangladesh in aircraft chartered by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. By the end of 1973, 74,350 Bengalis, 48,654 army men and their families, and 25,696 civilians, had left for Bangladesh.

The delegates continued their visits to repatriation centres and prisons and their assistance to the Bengali minority.

In Bangladesh: The Central Tracing Agency's bureaux at Dacca, Chittagong, Khulna, Ishurdi and Saidpur registered all non-locals

who wanted to go to Pakistan and met the requirements agreed on by the Governments of Pakistan and Bangladesh. By 31 December, there were 469,145 registrations but as there was some duplication the exact number of persons concerned is not known. The same procedure as described above was applied for entry visas for Pakistan, the issuing of ICRC ad hoc identity documents and the filling in of repatriation cards.

The ICRC delegates also helped the local authorities in the transport and assembly of non-locals in the Dacca and Chittagong departure camps. By the end of 1973, 33,849 non-locals had been transferred from Bangladesh to Pakistan by the airlift organized by UNHCR.

While repatriation operations proceeded, the ICRC continued its aid to non-locals.

Indo-China

As mentioned in the Annual Report for 1972 (page 46), the ICRC and the League of Red Cross Societies decided in December 1972, in view of the impending cease-fire in Vietnam, to establish an integrated general staff, which was to be called Indo-China Operational Group (IOG) and to which the two institutions entrusted the formulation and execution of International Red Cross Assistance to Indo-China (IRCA).

In 1973, therefore, IRCA delegations were established in the capitals of the Republic of Vietnam, the Khmer Republic and the Kingdom of Laos. While in the latter two countries all functions were assumed by the IRCA delegation, the ICRC delegation was maintained in the Republic of Vietnam, as well as an IRCA delegation.

As IOG issues its own periodic reports, only an outline of IOG's chief activities is given here.

Republic of Vietnam

Prisoners of war: While the greater part of the prisoners of war were exchanged in 1973, a small number did not benefit under the provisions of the Paris Agreements of 27 January 1973. They were