News
Ministry



Sr. Minita Chisim hands out food to residents of the Bangladeshi village of Mariapolli, who lost their homes, food and clothes in a storm April 9. Amid a cyclone May 26-27, the Congregation of Our Lady of the Missions Sisters also arranged shelter and provided food in their school for people in the southern village of Bagerhat. (Courtesy of Sr. Sukriti B. Gregory)



by Sumon Corraya

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Bagerhat, Bangladesh — June 26, 2024

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After the severe cyclonic storm Remal made landfall in Bangladesh, May 26-27, more than a dozen people died, with the heavy rain and strong winds affecting about 3.7 million. During this natural disaster — as well as another severe storm that struck in April — the Congregation of Our Lady of the Missions Sisters arranged shelter and provided food in their school for people in the southern Bangladeshi village of Bagerhat, one of the areas most prone to such calamities.

"For three days, my wife and I, along with our two children, took shelter at St. Joseph's Primary School in Basabari, Bagerhat. The nuns and priests welcomed us warmly," said Raton Banerjee, a 48-year-old cobbler and member of Our Lady of Fatima Church, Bagerhat.

Like Banerjee, more than 400 Catholics took shelter in the nuns' school in Bagerhat due to flash floods that affected their homes. The monthly income for people in this area is typically less than $100 USD.

Rojina Halder, from Mariapolli village, said that flash floods swallowed her home located on the river bank. "We were helpless. We asked nuns to give us shelter in their school situated in the top place, and nuns agreed." Halder told GSR. "They welcomed us warmly and also provided us with food," she added.

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Sr. Minita Chisim, the superior of the Bagerhat convent of Our Lady of the Missions Sisters, visits Niva Halder of Mariapolli village, who was injured by a storm on April 9. (Courtesy of Sr. Sukriti B. Gregory)

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On May 26 and 27, Catholics from Bagerhat Catholic Church took shelter at St. Joseph's Primary School. More than 400 people gathered there, where nuns and priests provided them with safe drinking water and food. (Courtesy of Sr. Sukriti B. Gregory)

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Srs. Sukriti B. Gregory and Lucky Soren, both of Our Lady of the Missions, distribute rice to cyclonic storm Remal victims on May 26 at their school. (Courtesy of Sr. Sukriti B. Gregory)

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Chompa Das, 35, stands before her house that was damaged in the storm April 9. She has two children with her husband, a shoemaker. Das couldn't afford to repair their house. When Cyclone Remal struck on May 26, she and her family members found shelter in a nuns school, for which she expressed gratitude. (GSR photo/Sumon Corraya)

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Swapon Sarder, 55, a shoemaker and cobbler, is a resident of Mariapolli village and was the victim of two recent storms. The nuns helped him and his family during the disasters. He earns roughly $2 a day. (GSR photo/Sumon Corraya)

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Haju Halder, 77, struggles to walk. During the storms, her relatives carried her to a secure place. (GSR photo/Sumon Corraya)

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Sathi Sarder, 35, is pictured with her three sons and mother-in-law. Their house was damaged in the storm. They also couldn't repair it fully; as a result, they cannot install fans and endure heatwaves. (GSR photo/Sumon Corraya)



Sr. Sukriti B. Gregory, a member of Our Lady of the Missions Sisters, is pictured at her convent. (GSR photo/Sumon Corraya)

The 45-year-old housewife recalled another storm that struck just six weeks earlier, April 9. "We had just returned from church after holy Mass and were preparing food when the strong storm hit our house. It collapsed on me, my mother-in-law, and my son," she recounted, adding that her husband rescued them.

In the same storm, Niva Halder was injured badly, requiring seven stitches on her head. The 55-year-old woman recalled that "the strong storm hit our house, and I was escaping from our weak house. At that time a tin hit my head; later I discovered my relatives took care of me as I became senseless."

Nuns then visited Mariapolli and distributed 5 kilograms (about 11 pounds) of rice and a kilogram of lentils (about 2.2 pounds) for the 18 Catholic families who were most affected.

Sr. Sukriti B. Gregory, a member of Our Lady of the Missions Sisters and headmaster of St. Joseph's Primary School, told GSR that she was pained to see the situation of

people in both natural disasters; many victims were her school's students.

Sr. Sukriti B. Gregory, a member of Our Lady of the Missions Sisters and headmaster of St. Joseph's Primary School in Basabari, Bagerhat, speaks about helping storm survivors in Bangladesh. (GSR video)

"I immediately contacted our superior general in Dhaka and told her that we want to help the victims, and we got support from the superior general. Later, we provided them with some food items," Gregory said. She also said that in the latest cyclonic storm, Remal, the local priest Fr. Dominic Halder and the Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace offered to collaborate with the sisters. "They provided us money to feed flood victims while they stayed in our schools for two nights and three days," she added.

Halder, the priest in charge of Bagerhat Catholic Church in Mariapolli, told GSR that the people in his parish earn very little money, with most of them working as hairdressers and shoemakers.

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"Every year, they suffer from natural disasters and lose their homes," he said. "Additionally, the salinity in the local water makes it difficult for people to find safe drinking water. They need brick houses to withstand these conditions." Halder added that he is trying to collect funds for Catholics who need to repair their houses.

After severe storms like cyclones, older people and children in the coastal population are especially vulnerable. Severe storms occur frequently in Bangladesh, and many people in coastal areas have moved to the capital city, Dhaka, or other cities as internal migrants.