

Cyclone Nargis

The cyclone Nargis, in Myanmar (Burma) took place on 5 May 2008. Though a terrible event, it makes for an ideal example of a hazard in a LEDC country and what the primary and secondary effects of the hazard are on the resident population. It provided clear examples of how external factors such as the political regime of the country, the environment and infrastructures can inhibit the supply of relief and how the news media across the world reported the disaster and the relief effort.

Information at the start of the event was difficult to obtain and was 'sketchy' in the detail. However, the three main primary impacts of the cyclone were apparent; the strong winds, the tidal surge and the heavy rainfall. These had most impact on the low lying area of the delta and offshore islands of the River Irrawaddy. The eyewitness reports confirm these primary impacts but were at first more vague when it came to the impact on individual settlements and the human population. This is probably because information was difficult to obtain without having correspondents and others with access to computers and telephones 'in theatre'.

The secondary effects took rather longer to be made available and at the time of writing are only just becoming clear. But these again were the 'classic' impacts of a natural hazard taking place in an LEDC country, for example; the lack of clean water, the high risk of disease, the difficulties of communication, lack of shelter and the problem of how to deal with the social and psychological impact of family and community break up. The climate and terrain are other factors which come into play. This was exacerbated by the political regime and environmental and social factors in Myanmar and the difficulty international organisations had in getting aid into the country, especially the more remote, inaccessible locations. This was certainly the case in the most affected Irrawaddy delta area. The total number of fatalities remains unknown; it is always difficult to obtain accurate information but at the time of writing this is put at around 70,000.

The China Earthquake

On Monday 12 May 2008, the Sichuan province of China was hit by an earthquake measuring 7.9 on the Richter scale at 14:28 local time. The earthquake affected a large area and was felt as far away as Beijing, Bangkok, Hanoi and Shanghai. The initial death toll was put at around 9,000.

The earthquake occurred on the plate boundary between the Indian and the Eurasian Plate. The epicentre was in the mountains of the Eastern Margin of Qing-Tibet Plateau at the northwest margin of the Sichuan Basin. The earthquake occurred as a result of motion on a northeast striking thrust fault that runs along the margin of the basin.

Rescuers found it difficult to reach the epicentre of the earthquake largely because of landslide blocked roads and heavy rainfall hampered rescue efforts. Large numbers of troops were mobilised and help dispatched to the area, partly to 'ensure social stability'. The Chinese government, perhaps for the first time, allowed massive media coverage which resulted in considerable international support. Both Prime Minister and President visited the areas affected.

There was a threat that the Zipingpu dam which was damaged by the earthquake would bust and swamp the nearby town and its 6000,000 inhabitants. In the event this did not occur. On May 17 aftershocks continued to affect the area. These were as strong as 6.1 on the Richter scale.

Useful Links

<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/news/world.html> - This site has a comprehensive index of world news sources, especially newspapers, and a comprehensive list of links to news websites within the United States.

<http://www.bangkokpost.net/> - This is the link to the Bangkok Post news source 'local' to Myanmar, which gives a different perspective than the European Press.

<http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/> - This is the link to the Chinese People's Daily. It is interesting to use this as a source to investigate how much and what sort of coverage the cyclone event had in a different, but still Asian country. In this case the story was taken from one of the main press agencies.

<http://www.straitstimes.com/> - This link is to The Straits Times, a Singapore newspaper with a good English coverage of South East Asia.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/> - This link is to the Times of India. This newspaper, in English, gives a different perspective from another Asian Country.

<http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/tropicalcyclone/index.html> - This site provides background on the causes and tracks of cyclones.

Many other links to relevant news articles and other sources can be found in the Resources area of the Geographical Association website.

For Earthquakes: <http://www.geography.org.uk/resources/earthquake/>

For Cyclones: <http://www.geography.org.uk/resources/cyclonenargis/>