

A-PAD Report on Air Reconnaissance Floods – 26 May 2017

Asia Pacific Alliance for Disaster Management (A-PAD) initiated an air reconnaissance to assess the extent of disaster which claimed over 122 lives and another 99 missing in a few hours following the heavy rains which caused floods and landslides affecting many districts. The magnitude of the disaster and the limited resources for emergency response required a clear assessment of the ground situation to optimize resources in saving lives and also to further forecast warnings and evacuations.

Air Reconnaissance Team

The team comprised of decision making officials from the Disaster Management Centre (DMC) – Ministry of Disaster Management (MoDM), Department of Irrigation, National Building and Research Organization (NBRO), Media and A-PAD SL.

- RMS Bandara - Director Landslide, Research and Risk Management Division – NBRO
- RSP Samansiri - Asst Director Mitigation and Research – DMC
- S Kokularamanan - Chief Engineer – irrigation Department
- Firzan Hashim - Country Director, A-PAD SL
- Indika Handuwela - Media, Sunday Times

Flight Route

A-PAD chartered a 6-seater helicopter from IWS Aviation. Flight path was planned by team experts in consultation with the Captain of the helicopter. Biyagama – Ratnapura – Galle – Bulathsinghala – Kalutara – Kaduwela and return to Ratmalana was the decided route.



Situation

The inundation witnessed en-route was unimaginable. Ratnapura, Udwalawe and Pelmadulla were severely affected with large amount of inundation. Safe areas were difficult to find and the rapid inundation had stranded the people. Whilst the Galle town was not affected its environs were severely affected.

Minor and major landslides were witnessed. Bulathsinghala landslide being the worst. The helicopter encountered bad weather en-route and had to change course. Nagoda and Akuressa were affected with many stranded people requesting evacuation. Limited rescue by boats were seen in progress.



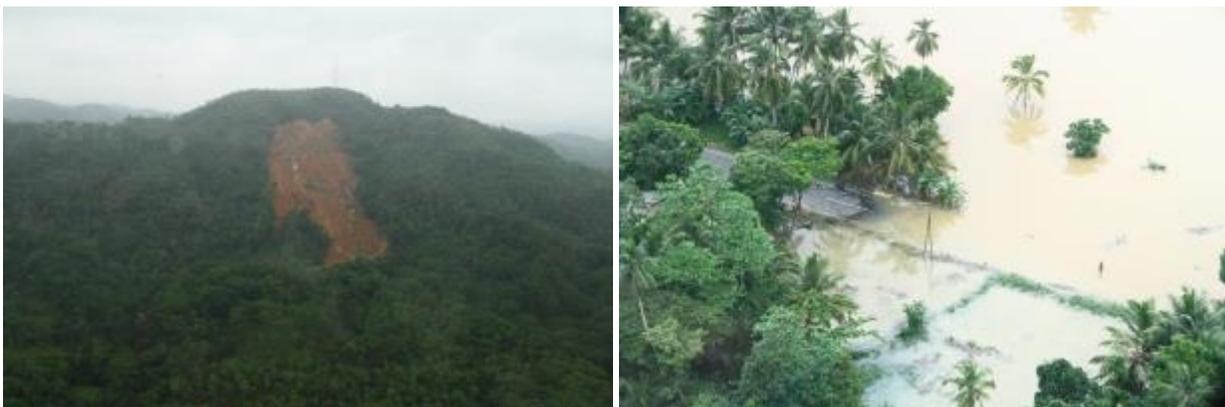
Assessment

The flight route covered landslide prone areas and the banks of major rivers for the NBRO and Irrigations officials to better assess the situation. Water levels of rivers especially of the Ginganga, Nilwala ganga, Kalu ganga, and Kelani ganga were observed for an analysis and future prediction.

The required extent for search, rescue and emergency response based on the calamity witnessed by air was recorded by DMC. The damage caused the why the abnormally high number of deaths within a few hours required assessment from experts visually.



The photos taken by Sunday Time Specialist photographer enabled the experts to compare their previous mapping with the reality to better understand and forecast/assess the calamity and possible extension to the disaster.



De-Brief

Following the air reconnaissance which lasted for two and a half hours, the team met at the office of Director Landslides, research and risk management at the NBRO. The proceedings were discussed and how best to optimize the aerial view to respond to emergency and forecast the next few days were concluded. The usage of footages and vital aerial photographs by the experts in updating their forecast diagrams and plans were discussed. All information gathered among team members were shared.



Conclusion

The speed in which the team was put-together and logistics arranged for immediate take off was possible due to the international and local networks. Pre-planning via A-PAD platform enabled to respond faster. This also is a rare occasion in which the experts had the opportunity to compare their analysis/predictions by seeing the reality. Media maximized the opportunity in providing its readers and viewers the factual situation of the calamity. The footages and photos will be widely circulated.



26th May 2017