

Two S'pore aid agencies get nod to enter Myanmar

Workers can now start to deliver emergency relief items to victims

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AT LEAST two welfare organisations in Singapore have finally received the nod from the Myanmar government to enter the cyclone-battered country.

Three members of the Singapore Red Cross will fly into Myanmar today and start laying the groundwork for its nine-member medical team to enter the country later this week.

Meanwhile, three members of The Salvation Army have been told to collect their visas. They include Commissioner David Brigans, the commander who oversees Salvation Army centres in Singapore, Malaysia and Myanmar.

They expect to be in Myanmar by Thursday.

It is good news for the groups, which have wanted to enter the country since Cyclone Nargis hit on May 3.

Said relieved Singapore Red Cross secretary-general Christopher Chua: "We can now start to plan how to reach those who need help urgently."

Until now, the Singapore Red Cross has had no way of getting emergency relief items – including 10 Singapore-made water purification systems, 1,000 tents and 35,000 family food packs – to its Myanmar counterpart.

The Myanmar military junta's initial receptiveness to aid – but not to workers and experts from foreign aid agencies – had led some to question how much of their donations was actually reaching the victims.

World Vision Singapore, which provides emergency relief and developmental aid, tried to allay concerns over the weekend.

It spoke out to show how it, at least, had been able to get a significant amount of aid to the ground.

This was thanks to its 600-strong staff, made up mainly of Myanmar nationals, allowing it to function like a "grassroots organisation", it said.

World Vision has delivered 35 tonnes of rice and 18,000 litres of drinking water, as well as diesel fuel to allow generator pumps to continue to pump water to the victims, it said.

Clothing, blankets and tarpaulins had also been distributed to people living in and around Yangon, it added.

World Vision estimates that some 700,000 people and 10,000 children have been affected in four of the worst hit delta communities.

World Vision Singapore has collected an estimated \$144,000 in the Republic so far. The money will go towards achieving its global target for Myanmar aid funding of US\$3 million



PHOTO: AFP

IN DIRE NEED: A house on Haing Gyi island that was destroyed by Cyclone Nargis. The Singapore Red Cross has 1,000 tents, 35,000 family food packs and 10 Singapore-made water purification systems waiting to be delivered to Myanmar.

(S\$4.1 million) to help 250,000 people for a month.

Donations have also continued to pour in to other aid agencies here.

The Singapore Red Cross has raised about S\$600,000, surpassing its initial target of S\$500,000. But it has since

revised that target upwards to help deal with waterborne diseases.

Mercy Relief and the Salvation Army have raised S\$203,400 and S\$70,000 respectively.

While aid agencies welcomed the fact that the My-

anmar government is relenting and allowing them into the country, they hope even more people will be let in soon.

In an editorial written over the weekend, Mr Tim Costello, chief executive officer of World Vision Australia, who is in Myanmar, said

there was a need to turn the "trickle of aid into a flood".

He said: "There are thousands of people receiving aid every day, yet there are tens of thousands more still to be helped...The clock is ticking in the race to save lives."

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