A massive cloud burst occurred in Leh after torrential rains in the intervening night of 5-6 August, 2010. The worst hit areas were Leh Bus Stand and nearby Choglamsar village. More than 200 persons lost their lives and 200-250 were injured. 5 relief camps were opened in the affected areas.

Damages reported were

- BSNL exchange and Bus Stand in Leh Town has completely been washed away.
- The Civil Hospital and the Leh Airport has been inundated.
- The Nyoma-Leh road has been blocked due to heavy mud-slide.
- The Fayang Bridge on the National Highway between Kargil and Leh has been washed away, thus, disrupting traffic.
- The pumping station has been washed away thus, disrupting water supply in Leh Town Ship.
- The Cultural Institute of Buddhist Studies has been affected.
- CRPF camp completely washed away.

Around 6000 Army and Paramilitary personnel were been deployed for rescue and relief operations in the affected areas.

In Leh, 01 NDRF team consisting of 45 personnel deployed in Leh along with rescue and relief equipment i.e Medium Arctic Tents-250 Nos, Tarpouline-120, Angle Cutter-06, Inflatable Boat-03, Chain Saw-06, Generator Set-03, Bolt Cutter-11, Hand Saw-06, MFR Kit-03, Breathing System-03, Oxygen Cylinder-03, Medicine from RML Hospital, Delhi for rescue and relief operations. DM Division, MHA provided 05 Nos INMARSETs to State Government of J&K, Leh for emergency communication purpose.

More than 1,400 people have died across 19 of India’s 28 states during the monsoon rains this year.

On 7th August 2010, Secretary General of IRCS along with the Union Heath Minister who is also the Chairman of IRCS visited Leh. They interacted with the affected families and also they paid visit to the government hospital. While they were in the Hospital, someone came shouting that the water is coming. Everyone started running away from the hospital and without thinking of others. However after some time people came to know that it was a rumour. After the flash flood in Leh, such
rumours were spreading very often and people were so scared that at night time they were staying on the hills.

A team of IRCS 5 staff and volunteers were present in Leh for conducting Disaster Management training in Leh. On 5th August 2010, inauguration of this training took place while in the night this mishap happened. Luckily nothing happened to these five persons who were from Srinagar.

This team of 5 came into action immediately and got involved in search and rescue, transported dead bodies to a place identified by police before disposing them. As many other foreigners and local people got involved in search and rescue who were later joined by Army, IRCS team decided deliver First aid services in hospitals. Apart from this what ever assistance was required by the patients IRCS volunteers tried to extend to their maximum.

One of the core activities of Indian Red Cross Society is Family News Service and Tracing.

As these volunteers were also specialised in family news service and tracing, they started reunifying families and shared messages of well being of their loved ones.

The telephone lines in Leh were down for many days, which was the main challenge everyone involved in the relief and rescue operation were facing. Out of the three mobile networks, Airtel and Aircel were working intermittently while BSNL network was worst hit by the disaster.

Meanwhile IRCS staff and volunteers continued providing services like search and rescue, first aid, and family news service. At the same time in Delhi coordination mechanism was established with the Ministry of Health to air lift non food items and water purification units.
Three national disaster response team members along with relief supplies and water purification unit landed in Leh on 11th August 2010.

The major challenge in front of the team leader was to bring all Red Cross volunteers together and give them unified strategy for response, establish links with the district collector and his office, arrange for the storage space, transportation and human resource for the relief supplies arrived at the airport.

Leh being at high altitude, personnel arriving from low altitude areas need some time to get acquainted to the environment as oxygen is very thin over there. During the operation this was one of the major challenges as many team members were having headaches almost everyday. One team member was admitted on the second day to the mission, as he suffered with breathing problem and severe headache.

On arrival a meeting was convened in the Circuit house by the team leader where all staff and volunteers participated. Now it was a team of 9 including a German Red Cross volunteer who was on his vacation in Leh.

The entire team members were briefed about the objectives of the mission. Only three objectives of the mission were drawn which are as follows:

1. Installation of two water purification units
2. Distribute relief supplies
3. Continue with the FNS and tracing service

On the very first day, team was divided in sub groups and were given specific tasks related to logistics (2 groups), and FNS and Tracing (1 group). Vehicles were hired and groups started working on the assigned tasks.

In just few hours warehousing space was identified, trucks were obtained from district administration and counting of relief items at airport was completed. The transportation of relief supplies and water purification units to the warehouse continued till late evening. On the very first day rapid assessment was done also completed.

Team members came together for Dinner and reviewed the day’s work and strategy for the next day was chalked out.

On the second day as suggested by the district administration, team visited Saboo village to explore the feasibility of installing water purification unit. Saboo village is around 12 KMs away from Leh. The houses in the village were scattered and water source was far off from the village hence the water purification unit could not be installed in this village. As the roads were severely damaged, IRCS team lost more than a day in visiting this village. The pressure to deliver purified water to the affected population started mounting on the team however no location was identified till evening. Again discussion was held with the public health engineering department and the collector’s office, a decision was taken to visit Choglamsar. Team visited Choglamsar and identified a site for installation of water purification unit.

Due to decaying dead bodies trapped under the debris in Choglamsar strong smell was persistent in the area. Also the percentage of the dust particles was very high in the air. Masks were very
essential to work in this area however there was no availability of masks in the market and team had to work without masks till masks could be arranged from the other agencies in Leh.
Leh Cloud Burst Relief Operation..A case study