

# Toronto volunteers set to join relief efforts in hard-hit areas

**PAOLA LORIGGIO**

STAFF REPORTER

Four Torontonians were headed to Burma today to bring clean water and essential medicines to the thousands of victims of Cyclone Nargis, as part of a charity aid mission staffed by volunteer paramedics and rescue workers.

The team is undeterred by reports that red tape is holding up aid efforts in the country.

Though they don't have visas to enter Burma, the volunteers are confident they'll make it to their destination, said Rahul Singh, charity director for the David McAntony Gibson Foundation, the non-profit organization behind the relief mission.

"We'll get in," Singh said, adding he hopes the visas will come through before the group lands in Thailand, where others will join the mission.

If barred from Burma, also known as Myanmar, the volunteers will send supplies to a contact inside the country, he said.

The team is packing 5 million water purification tablets; 20 portable

water purification systems, each able to provide water for 1,000 people a day; one mid-size system, enough for 40,000 people a day; and an emergency medical kit, which can treat about 50,000 patients.

The devastating cyclone has killed tens of thousands of people in Burma, according to state reports. Up to a million people may be without homes.

Singh said he expects to find the country in "horrible" condition.

"Some countries that get a lot of disasters . . . they have some kind of infrastructure to deal with them," he said yesterday as the team prepared for the trip.

"But in Myanmar, they don't have the capacity."

The charity relies on donations of equipment and supplies. All volunteers are trained paramedics, police officers and firefighters.

Disaster responses have included tsunamis in Sri Lanka and the Solomon Islands, earthquakes in Indonesia and Pakistan; hurricanes in Guatemala and Grenada; and typhoons in the Philippines.