

INFORMATION BULLETIN



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

INDIA: COLD WAVE

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This Bulletin is for information only. The Federation is not seeking any funding or other assistance from donors for this operation at this time.

The Situation

Over 700 people have died in a month-long cold spell which has spread across northern India and Bangladesh according to the latest media report, with 332 dying in Indian states of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkand and Rajasthan, and the rest in Bangladesh since mid-December last year (see Bangladesh: Cold Wave Information Bulletin, 3 January). While the dropping temperatures are a yearly feature caused by western disturbances over the mountain ranges in the north west of the country, it is taking its toll on the most vulnerable sections of society.

The biting cold wave continues unabated across several parts of India with icy winds spreading to central and eastern parts over the past seven days. Forty more fresh deaths have been reported in the poor eastern state of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in the past 24 hours. Most of the dead were poor and homeless. The westerly winds were keeping the daytime temperatures at least eight-nine degrees Celsius below normal. The coldest day or night in the season was recorded in many cities in the region and in Kanpur city of Uttar Pradesh, the coldest night in the last 12 years was recorded last week. In Bihar, over 1,000 cattle had also reportedly perished in the cold. The celebration of Lohri bonfire on 13 January, which traditionally signals the harvesting of Rabi crop and the culmination of winter, was swayed by the cold wave this year. The persistent icy weather is threatening to destroy the wheat crop in a number of states. This has aggravated the suffering of many already drought-affected population.



The low visibility due to heavy fog has disrupted life across the region, holding up flights, rail and road traffic. The capital city of Delhi was shrouded these few days by a thick blanket of fog and biting cold temperatures - the lowest temperature this season was 3.7 degree Celsius on 12 January. The day temperature remained four degrees below normal. Most of the schools in Delhi and cold affected states were closed until 14 January. The closure may be extended for a few more days. The authorities in the worst hit states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have been distributing blankets, providing bonfires on roadsides. Schools and government buildings are being used as shelters for the homeless.

The weather department predicted that the cold spell over the plains of northwest India and the Gangetic plains may continue.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

Indian Red Cross national headquarters is monitoring the situation and is staying in close contact with the respective branches. The existing stock of blankets is being reviewed for necessary intervention. In the worst cold affected state of Bihar, the Indian Red Cross state branch has distributed 500 blankets and thousands of assorted clothes. The branch has mobilized resources from the local communities and is distributing 2,000 more blankets to the street dwellers in the state capital city of Patna. Similar attempts are being made at Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga, Munger, Bhagalpur, Gaya, Siwan, Aurangabad, Sasaram, Nawada districts. Situation reports are being collected from every other district and sub district branches. While the relief distribution of family kits including blankets and clothes is still going on in the remaining flood affected districts, the planned procurement of quilts for the elderly people has been expedited and distribution will take place shortly. The Federation India Operations Centre in Delhi along with the relief delegate based in Bihar is providing technical support to Indian Red Cross when necessary.



For a full description of the National Society profile, see www.ifrc.org

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For longer-term programmes, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal.

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