

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 والقمر الأحمر

INDIA/NORTHERN INDIA: COLD WAVE

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The Federation's mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity. It is the world's largest humanitarian organization and its millions of volunteers are active in over 180 countries. For more information: www.ifrc.org

In Brief

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

The Situation

Cold winds sweeping across the northern states of India have brought temperatures down to below normal in several areas and resulted in the death some 400 people (Indian Agency News Service – IANS - Reuters). Most of the dead were poor and elderly people. The capital of Punjab and Haryana, Chandigarh, recorded its lowest temperature in eight years at one degree Celsius. Meanwhile the minimum temperature in Amritsar plummeted by two to three degrees Celsius, making it the coldest location in the northern plains.

Dense fog compounded the misery in India's most populous state of Uttar Pradesh. Authorities have set up shelters, handed out blankets and lit bonfires to help the homeless. Temperatures have dipped to six degrees Celsius in some parts of the state. The average temperature in Uttar Pradesh at night has fallen by more than ten degrees in the past few days, as heavy snow fell across the Himalayan Mountains that form its northern border.

In adjoining Bihar state, the chill claimed 25 lives and the state government has asked all educational institutions, particularly schools to extend their winter break. Schools in Bihar had been used at night as shelters for the homeless and authorities have also lit bonfires for thousands of people living on the streets.

The Kashmir valley remained cut off from rest of the country due to heavy snow with 16 people succumbing to the bone-chilling cold. Fog has disrupted road, rail and air traffic during the past one week. The 300-km long Srinagar-Jammu national highway, the only surface link between Kashmir valley and the rest of the country, was closed to traffic after fresh snowfall rendered the stretch unsafe.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

The Indian Red Cross Society (IRCS) has been active in responding to the situation in affected states. According to the latest reports received from the Punjab, Bihar, West Bengal, Jammu and Kashmir, and Uttar Pradesh the following items have been distributed:

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No	Items	Quantity	State branch	Total value (Rupees)
1	Woollen blankets	3,000	Bihar	450,000
2.	Woollen blankets	500	Jammu and	290,000

India/North-India: Cold Wave; Information Bulletin no. 01

			Kashmir	
	Kitchen sets	500		
	Cloth	2,000 mts		
3.	Woollen blanket	3,000	Punjab	450,000
	Woollen blanket	2,000	Uttar Pradesh	345,500
	Kurta/ Pyjamas (men clothing)	100		
	Saalwar/Kameez (women clothing)	100		
	Shawls	100		
	Woollen muffler	100		
4.	Woollen blanket	100	West Bengal	34,500
	First aid box	2		
	PVC rolls (4m x 50 m)	5		
				1,570,000

In Punjab relief has been provided in the districts of Gurdaspur, Hoshiarpur, Navashahar, Amritsar, Ferozpur, Bhatinda, and Patiala. The state branch of Punjab set up a relief camp on 10 January, facilitated by the local authorities.

Red Cross volunteers were mobilised in the affected states to assist with relief distributions. The IRCS national headquarters has released material from the national disaster preparedness stock via regional warehouses, to top up their efforts and to respond to the current cold wave.

Pre-positioning of stocks by IRCS proved essential in allowing timely and effective assistance to the affected population. Donors are invited to support the ongoing India programmes, through the country annual appeal 2004.

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

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All International Federation Operations seek to adhere to the Code of Conduct and are committed to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (SPHERE Project) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

For support to or for further information concerning Federation operations in this or other countries, please access the Federation website at <http://www.ifrc.org>