

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

BANGLADESH AND 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 183 countries.

In Brief

This Information Bulletin No.01/2006 is being issued for information only. The Federation is not seeking funding or other assistance from donors at this time.

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The Situation

Areas of India and Bangladesh have been experiencing lower-than-normal temperatures, which are affecting vulnerable populations ill-prepared to cope with cold conditions. There are reports of over 100 cold-related deaths in Bangladesh while over 180 people are reported to have perished in India. Although the temperatures may not seem extreme by, for example, European standards, they are severe for the region and impact heavily on vulnerable populations, many of whom are homeless and are poorly resourced to cope with colder weather.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh has been experiencing a cold spell since late December 2005. For a country with a tropical monsoon



In Dhaka, Bangladesh, homeless women and children warm themselves by a bonfire (AFP/File/Shafiq Alam).

climate where winters are generally mild and short, the single-figure temperatures recorded have impacted greatly on vulnerable populations.

The cold spell has created the most severe impact on the central and northern regions of Bangladesh, affecting millions of people. Thick, heavy fog or mist has unsettled people's normal routines, while disrupting road traffic, train and flight services. Access to northern parts of Bangladesh by road has been disrupted, with many vehicles left stranded for several hours. Numerous international and domestic flights have been delayed for hours on a number of days. Compounding the situation has been the recent Eid (Haj) celebrations, where hundreds of thousands of people have been travelling back to their villages, mainly on public transport. There have been reports of many accidents caused by poor visibility.

Winds from the north over the northern and south-northern parts of the country have intensified the cold. The general population, used to much warmer weather even in winter, has perceived these temperatures as severe cold. These single-figure temperatures have caused extreme hardships, particularly for undernourished and underweight people, which include those already vulnerable following the loss of their homes during the 2005 floods. Thousands of people are suffering cold-related conditions (colds, fever, pneumonia, asthma, respiratory complications) and seeking treatment.

India



Two boatmen drag their boat through the frozen Dal Lake in Srinagar, India (AP Photo/Mukhtar Khan).

Several areas of the country have been experiencing significantly lower-than-normal temperatures. The 0.2 degrees Celsius recorded in Delhi on 8 January was the lowest temperature in the capital for 70 years. Vulnerable populations in states of the Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and northern areas of Rajasthan have been caught by the unexpectedly chilly temperatures.

Uttar Pradesh has borne the brunt of the human impact, with 145 reported deaths. The cold snap has been exacerbated by freezing north-westerly winds whipping down from the Himalayas. The Kashmir valley shivered when the mercury plummeting to minus 6.6 degrees Celsius in Srinagar. Water pipes and streams have frozen

in Srinagar, while the Dal Lake froze over for only the third time in 32 years.

Frosts, rarely experienced in areas of India, have hit the agricultural sector with crop damage of up to 15 percent reported in some regions. The low temperatures and accompanying fog have caused disruption to road, rail and air traffic. Primary schools in Delhi were closed for three days last week.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

Bangladesh

To date the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society has been distributing 15,600 blankets to vulnerable families in 68 districts throughout the country.

In anticipation of the cold weather and on the requests from district branches, the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society dispatched 5,400 blankets to 17 districts in the north on 11 December 2005 from emergency buffer stocks, providing assistance to 5,400 families. This was followed up with the despatch of 10,200 blankets on 21 December to 51 districts in southern and central parts of the country to assist 10,200 families.

The Bangladesh Red Crescent Society and the Federation delegation are closely monitoring the situation and would consider further distributions depending on feedback from branches.

India

The Indian Red Cross Uttar Pradesh state branch has distributed 1,800 assorted items comprising of woollen blankets, shawls and sweaters in the state capital, Lucknow. In Himachal Pradesh, the state Red Cross branch has distributed 500 shawls and blankets to vulnerable people. In Punjab, state Red Cross district branches in Gurdaspur and Bhatinda have distributed 500 blankets to vulnerable families. Even the extreme northeast state of Tripura is bearing the brunt of the cold wave and the local Red Cross branch has distributed warm clothes and blankets to 148 families.

Coordination

The Bangladesh Red Crescent Society is coordinating in the affected areas with local authorities, district relief and rehabilitation officers and community leaders.

The Bangladesh Red Crescent and the Federation country delegation are also working together with the disaster emergency response group tasked with coordination in affected areas. This group consists of various non-government organizations and United Nations agencies.

The Indian Red Cross Society national headquarters is closely monitoring the situation and is in constant touch with local government authorities and Red Cross state branches.

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