

INDIA: VIOLENT STORMS

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The Disaster

Winds of 160-180 kmh hit India's Northeast coast and West Bengal throughout the afternoon and evening of 24 March. A 110 kmh tornado ripped through the coastal areas of Tanton and Jaleshwar, making an estimated 10,000 people homeless as it flattened houses in 20 villages. It also caused the roof of a school to collapse killing over 20 children. There are reports that 40 others are still unaccounted for.

At least 125 people have been killed and 400 admitted to nearby hospitals. Another 400 suffered less serious injuries. The most affected villages in West Bengal are Sijua, Raipatna, Uttaritur, Ranipur, Sonakonia, and Kaspagola. Several hundred people are reported to be still trapped in the debris.

It is estimated that 50,000 people are directly and indirectly affected by fallen trees, broken power lines, and disrupted transport routes. The storms uprooted electricity poles and broke telecommunication links in the area. Traffic came to a halt as many trucks and other vehicles were overturned — some were thrown into nearby fields.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

Indian Red Cross Society (IRCS) medical and relief teams were dispatched from the affected districts soon after the storms hit. Relief teams are now distributing food, clothing and plastic sheeting. Travel is difficult due to the debris and aftermath of heavy rains. Senior IRCS officials are conducting a more in-depth assessment of needs following preliminary assessments.

IRCS Headquarters remains in contact with its local branches and is monitoring the relief and rescue operations. Some of the injured have been admitted to the Indian Red Cross Hospital at Balasore.

The Federation's South Asia Regional Delegation is in regular contact with IRCS to monitor developments. German Red Cross is attempting to make contact with its delegate in Bhubaneshwor, as is the Regional Delegation, but communication is proving problematic.

Government Action

The Government of West Bengal has set up several shelters, but access for victims and relief workers alike is very difficult. The Indian Government has despatched a high level team from its Agricultural Ministry for a further assessment.

Needs

Additional needs will be determined by the IRCS teams and local authorities. An appeal is not anticipated.

Ann Naef
Acting Head
Appeals & Reports Service

Hiroshi Higashiura
Director
Asia & Pacific Department