

*More than 150 dead as Afghans
battle cold wave*

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Kabul, January 27 (RHC)-- More than 160 people have died from a cold wave in Afghanistan this month in the worst winter in more than a decade, authorities said on Thursday, as the country is facing an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. Many were unable to afford fuel to heat homes in temperatures well below freezing.

“One hundred sixty-two people have died due to cold weather since January 10 until now,” said Shafiullah Rahimi, a spokesperson for the Ministry of Disaster Management. The coldest winter in 15 years, which has seen temperatures dip as low as -34 degrees Celsius (-29.2 degrees Fahrenheit), has hit Afghanistan in the middle of a severe economic crisis.

Many aid groups have partially suspended operations in recent weeks after the Taliban rulers last month banned women from working in nongovernmental organisations (NGO), leaving international agencies unable to operate many programmes. The Taliban, which returned to power in August 2021 after waging 20 years of armed rebellion, also banned women from attending universities in December.

In a snowy field in the west of the Afghan capital, children rummaged through rubbish looking for plastic to burn to help their families, unable to afford wood or coal. Nearby, 30-year-old shopkeeper Ashour Ali lives with his family in a concrete basement, where his five children shiver from cold. “This year, the weather is extremely cold and we couldn’t buy coal for ourselves,” he said, adding the small amount he makes from his shop was no longer enough for fuel.

“The children wake up from the cold and cry at night until the morning. They are all sick. So far, we have not received any help and we do not have enough bread to eat most of the time.”

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