

India court urges heat wave emergency declaration as deaths rise

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The High Court in the western state of Rajasthan said authorities had failed to take appropriate steps to protect the public from the heat.

An Indian court has urged the government to declare a national emergency over the country's ongoing heat wave, saying that hundreds of

people had died during weeks of extreme weather.

India is enduring a crushing heat wave with temperatures in several cities sizzling well above 45 degrees Celsius (113 degrees Fahrenheit).

It has not published nationwide figures for deaths attributed to the current heat wave but the eastern state of Bihar said Friday at least 14 people had "succumbed to death due to heat stroke" the previous day during extreme temperatures.

The High Court in the western state of Rajasthan, which has suffered through some of the hottest weather this week, said authorities had failed to take appropriate steps to protect the public from the heat.

"Due to extreme weather conditions in the form of (the) heat wave, hundreds of people have lost their lives this month," the court said Thursday, before the deaths in Bihar were announced.

"We do not have a planet B which we can move onto... If we do not take strict action now, we will lose the chance of seeing our future generations flourish forever."

The court directed the state government to set up compensation funds for relatives of any person who dies as a result of heat ailments.

Ruling on the current heat wave and such events in the future, it also said India should begin declaring them "national calamities", allowing the mobilization of emergency relief in a similar manner to floods, cyclones and natural disasters.

Among the deaths in Bihar were 10 poll workers preparing for the final day of voting in India's six-week election on Saturday, a news release from the state's disaster management office said.

Relatives of heatstroke victims told AFP that the state's rundown public hospitals were struggling to cope with the influx of patients through the week.

"The air conditioning in the emergency ward wasn't functioning on Thursday when dozens of patients were being admitted," said Naresh Kumar Singh from Gaya, one of the state's worst-affected districts.

Another 14 people died of suspected heatstroke and dozens more were admitted to hospital Thursday in the nearby state of Odisha, broadcaster NDTV reported on Friday.

More frequent, more intense

India is no stranger to searing summer temperatures but years of scientific research have found climate change is causing heat waves to become longer, more frequent and more intense.

As temperatures in the capital New Delhi shot up this week, power usage in the city of an estimated 30 million people surged to a record high on Wednesday.

Researchers say human-induced climate change has driven the devastating heat impact in India and should be taken as a warning.

The world's most populous nation is the third-biggest emitter of greenhouse gases but has committed to achieving a net zero emissions economy by 2070—two decades after most of the industrialized West.

For now, it is overwhelmingly reliant on coal for power generation.

The government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is seeking a third term in the elections, says fossil fuel remains central to meeting

India's rising energy needs and lifting millions of people out of poverty.

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