
HEAVY SNOWFALL GRIPS THE BALKANS

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Balkan Insight, 6 February 2012 The biggest snowfall in the Balkans in the past three decades has claimed lives and cut off villagers across the region. The cold snap continues in the Balkans, blocking roads, causing power cuts and leaving food and medicine in short supply in some areas. Emergency workers in Serbia this morning found a tenth victim of freezing - a 65-year-old man who died in his home in the town of Cuprija. The Serbian government on Sunday evening declared a state of emergency across its entire territory due to heavy snowfall and very low temperatures.

□□□□□ 37 municipalities have declared states of emergency, over 70,000 people are snowed in and cut off from the world, and nine people have lost their lives and one person is missing, Serbia should declare an emergency over the whole territory," said Ivica Dacic, Serbian Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister. The Serbian Ministry of Education has called on schools to suspend classes from February 6 to 10. Drivers have been warned that there is a coat of ice on many roads across Serbia, although main highways and roads remain open. The situation is similar in Bosnia. The heavy snowfall and freezing temperatures as low as minus 26 degrees Celsius have isolated villages, forced schools to cancel lessons until next week and led Sarajevo airport to cancel many flights. A seventeen-year-old boy, Ejub Nadzak from Zepce, was found frozen after he being reported missing on February 2. The worst problems are in the Zenica-Doboj canton in the Federation entity and in the high-altitude towns of Sokolac and Han Pijesak in Republika Srpska. A state of emergency has been declared in the Federation entity, as well as in many cantons there. Republika Srpska has not declared a state of emergency, but many municipalities within that entity have done so. Many villages around Sokolac, Srebrenica and Foca, in eastern Bosnia, are blocked by drifts. Supplies of food and medicine are running short because of the impassable roads. Although snow removal crews are working non-stop in many areas, they have been unable to make most roads usable. According to the weather bureau, the snowfall will continue in Bosnia until at least end of the week. Three old people were found dead due to the freezing conditions at the weekend in central Croatian villages which were cut off by heavy snow. A snow storm which affected most of the country on Friday stopped over the weekend but difficulties remain, especially in the coastal region of Dalmatia. Defense minister Ante Kotromanovic ordered the Croatian army to help clear snow in the coastal city of Split and in the Dalmatian hinterland. The temperature dropped as low as minus 20 degrees Celsius in some areas of Croatia over the weekend. Dozens of villages in the Dalmatian hinterland remain cut off. Firemen and rescue workers are delivering basic goods to inhabitants of those villages. One woman delivered a baby alone in Sebisna village near Imotski, because she couldn't reach hospital. School has been canceled in Split and Sibenik county, and a state of emergency has been proclaimed. The weather worsened last night in Montenegro. Podgorica airport is closed again, while buses are going only from Podgorica to Niksic and to the coast. The snow storm in Montenegro has claimed two lives so far. One person died while traveling on the road from Podgorica to Kolasin due to an avalanche. The other victim of the bad weather was found frozen near the northern town of Bijelo Polje.

Several groups of passengers have been rescued from avalanches on Montenegrin roads. Snow has also caused damage to the energy infrastructure and power cuts in some parts of the country. Due to heavy snowfall, in the past five days several cities in Kosovo have declared a state of emergency. According to Kosovos Meteorology Institute, the north-western region of Dukagjini (Metohija) was hit the hardest, while one meter of snow was reported in Peja and Istog. Tens of villages in these municipalities have been cut off. Kosovos security forces were called in on Sunday to evacuate around 50 school pupils trapped for a week in the Brezovica Ski Centre due to a roadblock caused by a five-meter deep avalanche. The primary school children were brought to Pristina on Sunday night. But the road still remains blocked, as are the roads leading to the borders with Montenegro (Peja-Kula-Rozaje) and Macedonia (Gllobocica). The Ministry of Education has ordered the closure of all primary and secondary schools for the entire week (to reopen 13 February) due to the [] winter A [] The temperatures are expected to drop to minus 22 degrees Celsius on Wednesday. Snowfalls throughout Macedonia have so far caused only minor traffic problems. Road traffic is slow due to overnight snow and ice. Apart from a ban on heavy vehicles in some mountainous areas, authorities say all main roads remain open. There are slight delays in railway and air traffic too but the main hubs remain open. Nadica Vckova from the Crisis Management Centre says several mountain villages have been cut off after snowfalls continued during the previous night. Snowy weather has also engulfed Albania, making dozens of roads in the countrys mountainous areas impassable. According to statement issued by the police on Monday morning, dozens of roads in the region of Kukes, Diber, Shkoder and Korca are blocked, while authorities are working to clear them. Several highways, including good parts of Albania-Kosovo highway could only be passed by cars equipped with tire chains. The police called on drivers to exercise particular caution while travelling, in order to avoid the risk of accidents. In Bulgaria, severe floods hit the villages in the south under pressure from heavy rain and snow. The Bulgarian village of Biser, near the southern town of Harmanly, has been flooded, as the local "Ivanovo" dam has burst. The National Institute for Meteorology and Hydrology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences has declared a Code Red warning, for very dangerous weather, in the regions of Smolyan and Kurdjali because of the combined hazards of heavy rain and runoff from previous heavy snowfall. A Code Orange warning for dangerous weather was declared for the western part of the country. . [] Orange was also declared in nine other districts: Vidin, Montana, Vratsa, Sofia and Sofia District, Pernik, Kyustendil, Pazardjik and Blagoevgrad.

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