

Fire destroys Asia's biggest chilli market

A major fire swept through Asia's largest red chilli market in Guntur town of Andhra Pradesh Saturday, destroying hundreds of shops and thousands of bags of chilli, police said.

The fire, which broke out in one of the shops, engulfed the entire market yard, destroying 450 shops of commission agents and over 300,000 chilli bags, according to traders. No loss of life was reported.

With strong wind blowing, the flames spread fast over the 56 acre market yard, causing panic in nearby residential areas. Guntur is located about 300 km from here.

Fire engines in the town proved insufficient. The authorities called more fire tenders from neighbouring Vijayawada and Prakasam districts.

Guntur District Superintendent of Police Mahesh Chandra Laddha said efforts were on to press a helicopter in service to drop water over the flames.

Market Yard officials estimated the loss at Rs.1-2 billion. One of them told a television channel that the fire engines did not reach in time, causing the flames to spread.

A police official quoted a witnesses as saying that smoking led to the disaster.

Chilli farmers from different parts of the state and even neighbouring states bring their produce to Guntur Mirchi Yard, which also serves as an export hub.

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