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# Over 140 hectares gutted in Uttarakhand forest fires

The fire that broke out in the forest near Nainital district headquarters took a horrific form, posing a threat to the residents of High Court Colony; district administration bans boating in Naini Lake in view of the blaze

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ISHITA MISHRA



In the last 24 hours, 31 new incidents of forest fire were reported from various parts of Uttarakhand, destroying 33.34 hectares of forest land. Photo: X/@PTI\_News

Massive forest fires sweeping through the dense foliage in the mountains of Uttarakhand for the past 72 hours have gutted over 142 hectares of forest land in the State. With a fire reaching the vicinity of an Air Force Station near the Nanda range, the Indian Air Force on Saturday deployed a Mi-17 V5 helicopter to douse the flames using a 'Bambi Bucket'.

The Forest Department said 23 new forest fires were reported on Saturday. Thirty-one such fires were reported on Friday and 54 on Thursday.

The Indian Army, on the request of the Forest Department, has also deployed two columns for firefighting in Kumaon.


District Forest Officer, Nainital, Chandra Shekhar Joshi told *The Hindu* that a forest fire was first reported earlier this week in the Nanda range, and it later spread downwards.

“The IAF has sought permission from the district administration to use water from the Bhimtal Lake using Bambi Bucket. They are dousing the fire near their establishment, while the rest of the fires are being controlled by the forest department,” Mr. Joshi said.

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The Bambi Bucket in a Mi-17 V5 helicopter can hold up to 3,500 litres of water at a time.




Mr. Joshi said the fire was around 10 km away from the city of Nainital and all efforts were being taken to bring it under control.

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Expressing concern over the raging forest fires, Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami said the government was working hard to bring them under control. "The forest fires are a challenge for us. This is a big fire. We are working for all the essential needs. We have asked for help from the Army... I am going to conduct a meeting in Haldwani today. We have conducted a meeting in Dehradun also regarding this. We will try to control the fire as soon as possible," he said, adding that the respective district administrations had been directed to take action against those found guilty of setting fire to the forests.

The forest fire protection team formed under the leadership of Divisional Forest Officer Rudraprayag caught a person named Naresh Bhatt from Tadiyal village, Tehsil-Jakholi. He was trying to set fire to the forests to pave a way for grazing of goats, the district administration said in a press release.

✿ A Flourish chart

In another arrest, Hemant Singh and Bhagwati Lal were caught red-handed while setting fire in the Dangwal village of North Jakholi. The accused were booked under the Indian Forest Act 1927 and sent to jail.