

# Forest fires ravage Uttarakhand

**PIYUSH SRIVASTAVA**

**Lucknow:** Uttarakhand is fast losing its green cover to forest fires, with the government struggling to devise a foolproof mechanism to keep them in check.

Conflagrations that gripped multiple forests on Monday spun out of control on Tuesday.

The cause of the fires is not yet known.

A massive fire that broke out in a part of the Kedarnath Wildlife Sanctuary has stoked fear among the people living nearby.

Digpal Rana, 50, the sarpanch of Sharanachai forest village under the Kedarnath sanctuary, said: "Ours is one of the worst-hit villages. The fire is growing every day and may reach our houses soon. The elderly are experiencing breathing problems because of the smoke. I have never seen such a massive forest fire."

Forest department ranger Kapil Gusai said they were trying hard to keep the flames in



**A firefighter attempts to contain a forest blaze in Bageshwar district, Uttarakhand, on Monday. (PTI)**

check, but the winds were posing a huge challenge.

"Locals are also helping us. During this season, dry leaves quickly catch fire, but the blaze this time is nothing like what we have seen," he said.

Residents of Mussoorie in Dehradun district woke up on Monday to fierce flames creeping up trees in the Camel Back Forest. Amit Kanwar, the divisional forest officer of Dehradun, said: "The fast-blowing

wind is making it difficult for us to douse the flames. We are at work, and there is no report of loss of human lives."

Sumit Kansal, convener of Nirankari Mission Sewa Dal, said members of his group had teamed up with locals to control the fire in the Camel Back Forest.

"Heavy smoke has engulfed the area near the forest," he said.

Forester Prakash Kandari

said: "The affected forest area is rocky. We are unable to check the blaze because the air is blowing fast."

A forest fire is also raging through Patwadangar in the Nainital division, causing significant damage.

Akash Gangwar, the divisional forest officer, said some people had intentionally caused the fire. "We are trying to rein it in with the help of fire tenders," he said.

Another wildfire engulfed Pandeykhola in Almora district and quickly spread to reach the chief medical officer's residence on the outskirts of the forest.

Narendra Singh Kunwar, the chief fire officer of Almora, said: "The department checked it before any unpleasant incident could take place."

Sources said the flames were spreading downwind where the forest cover was thicker.

Uttarakhand's total geographical area is around 53,483sqkm, out of which 37,999sqkm is forest land.