

Uttarakhand: 8 fresh forest fires in 24 hrs

DEHRADUN, Apr 28 (PTI)

THE firefighting operation in Uttarakhand's forests with the help of an Indian Air Force (IAF) helicopter continued for the second day on Sunday with the blaze being brought under control in several areas, officials said.

The State reported eight fresh forest fires in the last 24 hours, gutting 11.75 hectares, compared to the 23 such incidents damaging 34.175 hectares from Friday evening to Saturday evening, the Forest Department said in its daily bulletin. Since November 1, 2023, Uttarakhand has so far recorded 606 forest fires in which 735.815 hectares of for-



A view of the fire caught in the forest in Nainital on Saturday. (ANI)

est land were gutted, the bulletin said.

No major fire broke out in the forests over the past 24 hours, Kumaon's Chief Conservator of Forest Prasanna Kumar Patro said.

In the Kumaon region, fires are raging at two to three places in Nainital district and at one place each in Champawat, Almora, Pithoragarh and Bageshwar, Patro said.

The fire in the forests of

Ladiyakata and Pines area on Nainital-Bhowali road have been extinguished with the help of the IAF helicopter that was deployed on Saturday, he said. After the forest fire in Nainital reached dangerously close to the High Court Colony and the Air Force base containing sensitive equipment on Friday, an IAF helicopter was brought in to help quell the flames. The forest blaze in Nainital and adjoining areas is gradually being brought under control after the deployment of the IAF helicopter on Saturday morning, Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami said after reviewing the situation in the Kumaon region on Saturday night.

Private players will make space more accessible: ISRO chief

BENGALURU, Apr 28 (PTI)

PRIVATE players in space technology will certainly help speed up the research in the field, Indian Space Research Organisation chairman S Somanath has said while interacting with space enthusiasts, through the official Instagram page of ISRO.

Replying to an observation that SpaceX, a private entity, has contributed more to space technology than most countries, Somanath on Saturday said America's tradition of encouraging private companies to involve themselves in building rocket engines and, in the case of SpaceX, to explore

human flight vehicles can be replicated by India.

He said these companies are playing a crucial role in advancing technology, reducing costs and making space more accessible. It is possible for even private companies in India to develop these kinds of capabilities, he added.

However, he said this is only possible if the government supports the private entity, "For instance, some of the technology that is owned by NASA is transferred to Space X so that they could develop faster. This is why SpaceX has made such strides, it had nearly 45 launches this year," said Somanath.

China continues LAC infra build-up 4 yrs into face-off, shows latest sat imagery

Focus On Last-Mile Connectivity Through Roads, Bridges, Tunnels & Helipads

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New Delhi: Four years into the face-to-face military confrontation in eastern Ladakh, which also triggered tensions all along the Line of Actual Control, there has been no let-up in the way China continues to build border infrastructure and dual-use 'Xiaokang' villages, strengthen military positions and deploy additional aircraft at its air-bases facing India.

Latest satellite imagery, intelligence reports and other inputs show this ongoing Chinese activity in all the three sectors of the 3,488-km LAC, stretching from Ladakh to Arunachal Pradesh, defence and security establishment sources told TOI.

"People's Liberation Army (PLA) is relentlessly consolidating its military positions and support infrastructure in various depth and staging areas along the LAC, including near the buffer zones created after troop disengagements in eastern Ladakh," a source said.

China, for instance, recently completed construction of a road from the north of Samzungling to the Galwan Valley,



Increased PLA activity is seen in the eastern sector near Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh and Naku La in north Sikkim, a defence source said. India also continues to match PLA with 'mirror military deployments'

providing the PLA with a 15-km shorter alternate axis to rapidly build-up troops in the area.

A no-patrol buffer zone was created around Patrolling Point-14 in Galwan Valley three weeks after the violent clash in which 20 Indian soldiers and an unspecified number of Chinese troops were killed there on June 15, 2020.

Similarly, sources said, PLA has been progressively strengthening military and transport infrastructure to the rear of the other buffer zones on both banks of Pangong Tso, including the Kailash range, and Gogra-Hot Springs, all of which have largely come up in

areas that India considers its own territory.

PLA has also been focussing on last-mile connectivity through roads, bridges, tunnels and helipads to its forward positions, while also constructing new bunkers, camps, underground shelters, artillery positions, radar sites and ammunition dumps in other stretches of the LAC. "This increased PLA activity is especially being seen in the eastern sector, across Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh and Naku La in north Sikkim," another source said.

India, of course, continues to match the PLA with "mirror military deployments",

while it has also majorly cranked up infrastructure and capability development along the frontier, as earlier reported by TOI.

China has also offset some of its air combat disadvantage due to high-altitude terrain constraints by deploying additional fighters, bombers, reconnaissance aircraft and drones after upgrading its airfields like Hotan, Kashgar, Gargunsa, Shigatse, Bangda, Nyingchi and Hoping, among others, with new and extended runways, hardened shelters, fuel and ammunition storage facilities.

Latest inputs, for instance, show two new JH-7A fighter-bombers and three Y-20 heavy-lift aircraft, among others, deployed at Hotan in Xinjiang to add to the almost 50 J-11 and J-7 fighters, five Y-8 and Y-7 transport aircraft and KJ-500 AEW&C (airborne early-warning and control) aircraft already present there.

Sources say new Chinese dual-use 'Xiaokang' border villages are also regularly being built and older ones being "populated" along the disputed stretches of the LAC, especially in the eastern sector, to

reinforce PLA positions as well as lay claim to territory.

China has been building as many as 623 such border defence villages to fortify the borders of the Tibetan Autonomous Region with India and Bhutan over the last few years, as earlier reported by TOI.

"All this clearly indicates PLA will continue to permanently station troops in forward locations along the LAC, even if eventually there is some sort of disengagement at the two major persisting face-off sites at Depsang and Demchok in eastern Ladakh," a source said.

It was on May 5-6 in 2020 that dozens of Indian and Chinese soldiers were injured in the first major clash that erupted on the north bank of Pangong Tso after the PLA's well-planned multiple incursions into eastern Ladakh caught India off-guard initially.

Four years later, there are currently 50,000 to 60,000 PLA troops with heavy weaponry forward deployed in the western (Ladakh) and central sectors (Uttarakhand, Himachal) as well as 90,000 soldiers in the eastern one (Sikkim, Arunachal)

CDS Gen Chauhan's visit to France reaffirms long-standing strategic partnership: Govt

NEW DELHI, Apr 28 (PTI)

CHIEF of Defence Staff Gen Anil Chauhan interacted with top executives of several French defence majors, including Dassault Aviation, Safran and Naval Group, with a view to build futuristic capabilities of the Indian armed forces.

The interaction was part of Gen Chauhan's series of engagements during his nearly week-long trip to France that concluded on Saturday.

"Chief of Defence Staff Gen Anil Chauhan concluded a comprehensive visit to France, which has reaffirmed the continued long-standing strategic partnership between India and France," the Defence Ministry said on Sunday.

It is understood that India's plan to procure 26 Rafale

(Marine) jets and three Scorpene submarines from France figured in his talks.

In July last year, the Defence Ministry approved the purchase of 26 Rafale (marine) jets from France, primarily for deployment on board the indigenously built aircraft carrier INS Vikrant.

The Ministry had also cleared procurement of three Scorpene submarines from France.

Under the Indian Navy's Project 75, six Scorpene submarines have already been constructed in India by Mazagon Dock Limited (MDL) in cooperation with the Naval Group of France.

The defence and strategic ties between India and France have been on an upswing in the last few years.

The two strategic partners have been looking at co-devel-

opment and co-production of advanced defence technologies, including for the benefit of third countries.

Gen Chauhan held wide-ranging talks with senior civil and military leadership of France on ways to bolster the military cooperation between armed forces of the two countries. "The interactions of the CDS with Patrick Pailloux, Director of Civil and Military Cabinet of the Minister of the French Armed Forces, and Lt Gen Vincent Giraud, Chief of Military Cabinet of the Minister of the Armed Forces at the apex level and also with his counterpart, Gen Thierry Burkhard have enabled exchange of views on areas of common interests and mutual security concerns," the Ministry said.

It is learnt that the situation in the Indo-Pacific that has witnessed growing Chinese military muscle-flexing figured in the talks.



BRO rescues people stuck in Razdan Pass after snowfall

SRINAGAR, Apr 28 (PTI)

BORDER Roads Organisation (BRO) on Sunday rescued dozens of passengers whose vehicles got stuck in snowfall on Bandipora-Gurez Road in Jammu and Kashmir, officials said here. The BRO personnel swung into action as soon as they got the information about 35 vehicles that had been stuck on storm-hit Razdan Pass, the officials said. They said the BRO team first ensured the safety of the passengers and drivers before taking out their vehicles to safety. The road has been closed temporarily due to fresh spell of snowfall in Gurez valley and along the mountainous areas of Bandipora district.