

Raging wildfires disrupt life in U'khand, claim 4th life in 3 days

Sweep Through Almora Temple; Affect Flights

Gaurav Talwar & Pankul Sharma

Dehradun: Raging fires in several forest ranges of Uttarakhand have claimed the life of a 28-year-old woman — the fourth casualty in the past three days and fifth overall—even as

▶ **3 held for setting fires for social media 'views', P 9**

the Adi Kailash copter darsan service has been suspended for the second day in a row. Flight arrivals at the Naini-Saini airport in Pithoragarh have been stopped due to low visibility in fire-induced haze.

Pilgrims at Dunagiri temple, a prominent shrine in Almora district, were forced to flee on Saturday as fire engulfed the passage to the

CLOUD OVER UPCOMING TREKKING SEASON



Fire in Dunagiri temple, Almora

▶ Forests are spread over 24,305 sq km in Uttarakhand, accounting for **44.5% of its geographical area**

▶ **Highly flammable Chir Pine trees** make up nearly 4 lakh hectares. Long dry spells across Himalayas add to the problem

▶ Question mark on trekking in Kumaon as season **begins after May 10**. If fires are not controlled, advisories will be issued, say authorities

FIRES HAVE SPREAD TO SEVERAL FOREST RANGES



shrine, lined with bells. Videos showed pilgrims screaming and scrambling for safety, as leaping flames appear to give chase. Forest officials attributed the rapid spread of the fire to strong winds that transformed it into a "crown fire". Priests and the forest department team quickly helped pilgrims to safety and no casualties were reported.

Locals said the fires have left a trail of ash dust everywhere and they are breathing it in. "There are a few places on the road from Haldwani where rocks have fallen and there are landslides due to the fires. We are seeing the hills burning night and day... It's almost like an apocalypse," said a resident of Mukteshwar.

In Chamoli district, the bla-

ze engulfed a kiwi orchard. Fires on hilltops in parts of Garhwal region like Rudraprayag and Chamoli were also reported on Sunday. Forest officials said about 910 incidents have been reported since Nov 1 last year, when the first blaze was reported in the state, destroying 1,144 hectares of forest land.

▶ **Continued on P 9**

Xi's first Europe visit in 5 years aims to rebuild ties, starting in France

Paris: Chinese Prez Xi Jinping kicked off a three-country trip to Europe on Sunday with the continent divided over how to deal with Beijing's growing power and the US-China rivalry. On his first visit to Europe in five years, Xi appears intent on seizing opportunities to loosen the continent's bonds with the United States.

European carmakers are losing ground to subsidised Chinese electric vehicles. Diplomats fret about alleged Chinese spies in European capitals. And China's continued defence trade with Russia worries the continent. But Europe and China have hefty economic ties — EU-China trade is estimated at €2.3 billion per day — and Xi appears determined to rebuild ties after a prolonged absence due to pandemic.

Xi started Sunday in France, whose prez wants Europe to have more economic and strategic independence from ot-

her world powers. Then he heads to Serbia and Hungary, both seen as China-friendly and close to Russia. Xi's trip will be closely watched in Washington for signs of diminishing European support for its key foreign policy goals.

Xi was greeted at Paris' Orly Airport by French PM Gabriel Attal — and by protests by groups demanding that

France pressure China to respect Tibetan and Uighur minority rights. After arriving, Xi said he hoped the visit would bring "strategic convergence"



between China and France.

On Monday, French Prez Macron will treat Xi to formal honours of a full state visit. They will also meet with European Commission Prez Ursula von der Leyen, who is expected to join Macron in pushing for fairer trade policies and for China to use its leverage with Russia to push it toward ending the war in Ukraine. AP & NYT

Abu Hamza-led terrorists could be behind attack on IAF convoy

Sanjay Khajuria | TNN

Jammu: Combined teams of Army, paramilitary, and J&K police fanned out in a massive combing operation on Sunday in the mountainous forested terrain of J&K's Poonch, following the terrorist attack the previous afternoon on two IAF vehicles that left Corporal Vikky Pahade dead and wounded four of his colleagues. IAF mourned the loss of Corporal Pa-

kar-e-Taiba (LeT), is suspected to be behind the attack. Hamza is also accused of masterminding the killing of govt employee Mohammad Razaq on April 22 in Rajouri. Police have announced a cash reward of Rs 10 lakh for information about him. He is suspected to be operating in the jungles of Poonch and Rajouri.

According to a police spokesperson, senior Army and police officers visited the attack site to monitor the search. "Reinforcement were despatched to Jarra Wali Gali area," an official said. Para Commandos have been deployed in the ongoing operation, forces have set up barricades, and aerial surveillance is also being conducted with helicopters to locate and stop terrorists from escaping.

Corporal Pahade died of his wounds in hospital following the ambush on the trucks en route to Sanai Top in Surankote area, while returning from technical work on radars deployed in Poonch sector. "The four wounded Air Warriors were airlifted to Northern Command Hospital in Udhampur, with one reported to be critical and the other three in stable condition, according to doctors," an official said.

Sources said the terrorists used AK-series rifles, US-made M4 carbines, and steel bullets to inflict maximum damage.

Will boost counter-terror grid after June 4: Cong

Congress on Sunday said the Surankote terrorist attack against a security convoy, in which an IAF soldier lost his life and four others were injured, was part of a "worrying trend of terror attacks", particularly against security personnel, in Rajouri-Poonch area situated near the LoC. The party said after June 4, Congress and its INDIA bloc partners "will leave no stone unturned in strengthening the counter-terrorism grid". TNN

Pahade, a 33-year-old resident of Nonia-Karbal village in Madhya Pradesh's Chhindwara, who was supposed to return home to celebrate his son's birthday on May 7. He had joined his unit on April 18 after visiting his family for his sister's wedding.

A group of terrorists led by Abu Hamza, a foreigner affiliated with Lash-



Mas

Online
for Ent
progra
Agricul
The on
and Ph
from 1
payable
For mo
visit

One nation, one election to start in 5 years, says Rajnath

'If Elected, NDA Govt To Fulfil Commitment'

Sandeep.Raghavan
@timesgroup.com

Tirupati: Defence minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday said if elected to govern again, the NDA govt will implement the "one-nation-one-election" policy in the next five years.

"Lok Sabha elections and assembly elections are being held simultaneously in Andhra Pradesh. We will fulfil our commitment of 'one-nation-one-election' across the country by the end of the next five years. This will save a lot of time and energy," Singh said at an election rally in Jammalamadugu assembly constituency in Kadapa district.

He accused the YSRCP



Fate of key contestants like Amit Shah, Dimple Yadav and Supriya Sule will be sealed on Tuesday

govt of leading the state into a debt trap with its "corrupt" practices, adding that Andhra Pradesh's debt has skyrocketed to Rs 13.5 lakh crore during the current regime.

"BJP entered into a pact with TDP and Jana Sena in AP to end the corrupt rule of the Jagan Mohan Reddy govt," he said. "People of the state are fed up with the deteriorating law and order situation in the state," he added, urging people to pledge support to all the NDA candidates in the poll fray.

93 seats in 12 states/UTs to go for polls in Phase-3

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Campaigning for the third phase of Lok Sabha elections on May 7 ended Sunday in a blaze of high-decibel sound across 93 seats in 12 states and UTs, including all 25 seats of Gujarat and key constituencies with prominent contestants such

Dance of Democracy: P 10

as home minister Amit Shah in Gandhinagar, Jyotiraditya Scindia in Guna, Dimple Yadav in Mainpuri and Supriya Sule in the Pawar family stronghold of Baramati.

Besides Gujarat, the poll battleground for the third of seven phases spans 14 seats in Karnataka, seven in Chhattisgarh, four in Assam, five in Bihar, 11 in Maharashtra, 10 in UP, four in Bengal, two each in Goa, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, and Daman and Diu, and one in J&K.

Betul in MP was to vote during the second phase, but polling was postponed after the death of BSP candidate Ashok Bhalavi.

In Karnataka, where BJP is defending its presence in all 14 constituencies that will vote on Tuesday, PM Modi led the campaign with five rallies in two days. Shah held a roadshow in Haveri and a rally in Dharwad.

Congress MP Rahul Gandhi and AICC general secretary Priyanka Gandhi—the former campaigned in Shimoga and Raichur and the latter in Haveri and Davangere—focused on the Neha Hiremath murder and the Revanna sex scandal.

Among the opposition faces, Congress veteran Digvijaya Singh is in the battle for the Rajgarh seat. In Assam, AIUDF chief Badruddin Ajmal's borough Dhubri is among the seats at stake.

Hamas' West Bank commander killed in IDF raids

TEL AVIV, May 5 (IANS)

HAMAS announced on Sunday that its commander in the West Bank is among the four people killed in a raid by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF).

The deceased is identified as Alaa Shreiteh (45), West Bank commander of the al-Qassim brigades of Hamas. Shreiteh was earlier jailed in Israel between 2002 and 2016.

The IDF exchanged fire with Hamas at Daryl al-Ghusun on Saturday.

According to IDF, there was a twelve-hour gun battle in the Tulkarem area of the West Bank between its forces and Hamas militants in which four Hamas men were killed.

However, the identity of Alaa

Shreiteh was revealed by the al-Qassim brigade early on Sunday.

The Israel Police special forces together with units of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) on

Saturday eliminated five terrorists who had barricaded themselves in a building in Tulkarm. One IDF soldier was injured and referred for further medical treatment.

Islamic Jihad commander killed in Rafah: IDF

JERUSALEM, May 5 (IANS)

THE Israel Defence Forces (IDF) has announced that Aiman Zaarab, a senior commander of the Islamic Jihad Rafah Brigade, was killed in an airstrike on the southernmost Gazan city of Rafah.

Zaarab directed the Islamic Jihad's elite forces during the October 7 onslaught on

Kibbutz Sufa and the Sufa military post bordering the Gaza Strip, the IDF was quoted as saying on Saturday by Xinhua news agency. Zaarab had "commanded and directed" several attacks, and over the past few days, he led Islamic Jihad's preparations for combat in the southern Gaza Strip against Israel, according to IDF statement.