

Deadly wildfire encircles Turkish power plant

August 3 2021, by Kadir Demir



The government said it had contained 147 fires and was still fighting nine.

Roaring blazes encircled a Turkish thermal power plant Tuesday and forced farmers to herd panicked cattle toward the sea as wildfires that have killed eight people raged on for a seventh day.

The nation of 84 million has been transfixed in horror as the most destructive wildfires in generations erase pristine forests and rich farmland across swaths of Turkey's Mediterranean and Aegean coasts.

Frightened tourists have been forced to scamper onto boats for safety and dozens of villages have been evacuated as wild winds and soaring heat fan the flames.

An AFP team in the Aegean city of Hisaronu saw farmers pulling their screaming animals out of burning barns and shepherding to them to the relative safety of the beach.

"The [fire](#) happened in an instant," local farmer Mevlut Tarim said after managing to pull some of his panicked herd through pitch-black smoke and patches of burning turf encircling his farm.

"One of my cows died. It burned," he recalled. "I had never seen anything like it. You can't even call it a fire. It was really like a bomb."

'Whole new dimension'

Officials in neighbouring Greece have blamed two blazes on the island of Rhodes and the Peloponnese peninsula on a record heatwave they link to climate change.



Farmers pulled their screaming animals out of burning barns to take them to the relative safety of the beach.

Another fire near Mount Parnitha cut off Athens from large stretches of northern and southern Greece.

Temperatures in excess of 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit) across the south of Turkey have set off a record surge in electricity use that caused power outages Monday in cities such as Ankara and Istanbul.

But the mayor of the Aegean coast city of Milas said he was more worried about what might happen should an uncontrolled fire raising massive plumes of smoke over the region engulf the local thermal power plant.

Mayor Muhammet Tokat posted an increasingly urgent series of messages on Twitter showing the blazes spreading up a hill toward the presumed location of the plant.

"The fire has reached the residential complexes," he tweeted. "Going beyond this hill will mean that the fire will reach a whole new dimension."

He later reported briefing Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu about the unfolding crisis and then sheltered with some other local officials by the beach.



Turkey's most destructive wildfires in generations have erased pristine forests and rich farmland across swaths of the Mediterranean and Aegean coasts.

Anger at Erdogan

Tokat is a member of Turkey's main opposition party and one of a growing chorus of voices critical of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's response to the disaster.

The Turkish leader came under a torrent of angry ridicule on social media for tossing out bags of tea to confused locals while visiting the affected region under heavy police escort last weekend.

Erdogan also tweeted a message of thanks to "all friendly countries" after being criticised for being slow or unwilling to accept foreign offers of help.

Many Turks turn to social media for news after a crackdown that followed a failed 2016 coup against Erdogan saw top TV channels and newspapers fall under government influence.

Erdogan's media aide Fahrettin Altun warned that "information spread on [social media](#) platforms, instant messaging groups and forums is fake news" designed to make Turkey look weak.



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HaberTurk television also released a letter from the media regulator telling broadcasters they may be fined if they continue airing live footage of the fires and running stories "that provoke fear and worries in the public".

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Turkey's defence and interior ministers said they were also mobilising their forces to help the firefighters.

The Milas mayor suggested the help was arriving too late.

"It was obvious that this would happen," he tweeted as the fire neared the power plant. "I am going to cry in anger."

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