

Turkey battles wind-driven wildfire near resort for 3rd day

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Firefighting crews battled for a third day on Thursday a wind-driven wildfire that has blackened swaths of pine forest near a popular resort in southwestern Turkey and driven hundreds of people from their homes.

More than 2,500 firefighters, aided by water-dropping planes and helicopters, were deployed to fight the blaze that erupted on Tuesday in

the Bordubet region, near Marmaris on the Aegean Sea coast. The blaze spread rapidly, fanned by winds.

Fires were raging in three locations around Bordubet, but had been brought under control at a fourth location, according to the office of the mayor for the Mugla region, which includes Marmaris.

Authorities have evacuated close to 275 people from the area as a precaution, the municipality said.

Vahit Kirisci, the forestry minister, said about 3,000 hectares (about 7,400 acres) of forest were affected.

In addition to thousands of personnel, 45 water-dropping helicopters and 12 planes were involved in the efforts to tame the blazes, he said. Qatar offered to send three helicopters while Azerbaijan said it would send an additional plane, he said.

Authorities meanwhile, detained one person who allegedly confessed to having deliberately started the fire, the state-run Anadolu Agency quoted Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu as saying. Earlier, reports said prosecutors were investigating the possibility of arson.

Extended drought conditions in several Mediterranean countries, a heat wave last week that reached northern Germany and high fuel costs for aircraft needed to fight wildfires have heightened concerns across Europe this summer.

Last summer, blazes that were fed by strong winds and scorching temperatures tore through forests in Turkey's Mediterranean and Aegean regions, including Marmaris. The wildfires, which killed at least eight people and countless animals, were described as the worst in Turkey's history.

Villages and resorts had to be evacuated, with some people fleeing to beaches to be rescued by sea. The wildfires also threatened two coal-burning power plants.

Erdogan's government came under criticism for its inadequate response and preparedness to fight large-scale wildfires, including a lack of modern firefighting planes.

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