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**THE TIMES OF INDIA**

# To spot missing survivors, 3 UAVs overfly Kedarnath

Deeptiman Tiwary, TNN | Jun 25, 2013, 07.20 AM IST



National Disaster Response Force's operation in Kedarnath valley stood out as all survivors were rescued before a fresh spell of rain lashed the valley, worst-affected by floods that swept Uttarakhand.

NEW DELHI: Authorities were so concerned about not leaving behind a single survivor in the inaccessible areas of Kedarnath valley that on Sunday, the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) flew three UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles) through the day over the hills and jungles abutting the valley even as its personnel along with those of ITBP and Army combed the valley to ensure complete evacuation.

The operation in a way heralded the coming of age of NDRF that till now existed only on the fringes of public consciousness despite being the only specialized agency for disaster management in the country.

Having deployed around 600 personnel who rescued 6,234 stranded people from various areas in Uttarakhand, NDRF has managed to shake off the negative image associated with its parent body National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), considered a post-retirement parking lot for bureaucrats.

With NDRF currently being headed by ITBP chief Ajay Chadha, the personnel of the two forces have coordinated well and worked tirelessly to save many lives in flood-ravaged Uttarakhand.

Its operation in Kedarnath valley stood out as all survivors were rescued before a fresh spell of rain lashed the valley, worst-affected by floods that swept Uttarakhand. Along with ITBP and armed forces personnel, it helped carve new routes in the inaccessible areas around Rambada, Junglechetti and Bharochetti even as new helipad was laid near Rambada to ensure search and rescue of all survivors.

"Though we had searched the jungles and hills in the valley, we wanted to make sure no one was left behind. So we deployed three UAVs to scan the entire valley for survivors," NDRF IG Sandeep Rathore said. While NDRF owns one UAV named Netra, it hired two more UAVs from outside for the job. The images from the UAVs were monitored in real time and any suspicious locations were rechecked, said sources.

The force also fished out 125 dead bodies from the valley and is later expected to help state authorities with mass cremation as an epidemic breakout looms large due to decay. On Monday, it also rescued 120 people stuck on hills near Harsil in Uttarkashi, Chadha said.

Sources said that only about 50 people are left behind in Kedarnath valley who are in custody of NDRF and ITBP personnel. Most of these survivors are Sadhus who were caught running away with Rs 1.14 crore in cash of Kedarnath temple wealth.

"These sadhus had heavy bags when they were being rescued and were asked to leave them behind as it was adding to extra load on the chopper. However, defying all reason they refused to comply and on suspicion our men checked their baggage revealing cash," Chadha said.

An ITBP personnel said that post the discovery Sadhus have been insisting they will stay back in the valley "in service of the Lord" as they foresee police action against them as soon as they land in Dehradun.

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