



DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

**RAMPANT DEVELOPMENT, NOT
CLIMATE, PUSHING HIMALAYAS
TO THE EDGE**

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Context

- Recent disasters across Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Jammu & Kashmir suggest that the **real accelerant is man-made disruption**, while global warming certainly exacerbates environmental stress.

Fragility of the Himalayan Ecosystem

- The Himalayan ecosystem is **inherently fragile** due to its **young geological age**, steep slopes, and dynamic weather systems. It features:
 - High seismic activity due to tectonic movements;
 - Rapid erosion and landslides triggered by deforestation and slope destabilization;
 - ISRO reports that **glacial lakes in the Himalayas** have expanded significantly over the past three decades, with some growing by over 170%—a direct consequence of **warming and land-use changes**, increasing the risk of **glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs)**;
- The **IPCC reports** confirm that the Himalayas are **among the most climate-sensitive regions**.
- According to the State of Environment Report by MoEFCC (2021), over 30% of Himalayan glaciers have retreated in the last five decades.
- The **National Disaster Management Authority's SACHET Portal** highlights the increasing frequency of landslides, flash floods, and avalanches in Himalayan states.
 - These disasters are often worsened by **poor planning and lack of early warning systems**.

Recent Devastation

- In August, Punjab faced its worst floods since 1988 as the **Sutlej, Beas, and Ravi rivers overflowed**, submerging villages.
 - Several people died across Himalayan states due to torrential rains, while **Dharali village in Uttarkashi, Uttarakhand**, was wiped out by a landslide-triggered deluge.
 - These disasters echo past Himalayan tragedies — the **Kedarnath floods (2013)** and the **Chamoli disaster (2021)** — each treated **as an 'unprecedented act of nature'**.
- Between 2017 and 2022**, over 1,550 lives were lost and more than 12,000 homes damaged in Himachal Pradesh alone due to floods and landslides.

Man-Made Disruptions: Development vs. Ecology

- Unplanned Development:** Widespread infrastructure projects, especially hydropower plants, highways, and tunnels, are being built without adequate environmental or disaster impact assessments.
- Deforestation and Land Use Change:** Expanding agriculture, urbanization, and hydropower projects cause large-scale deforestation.
 - Forest Survey of India** reports highlight that forest cover in some Himalayan states is shrinking due to unregulated construction.
- Hydropower & Infrastructure Development:** The push for **dams, tunnels, and highways** has destabilized slopes.
 - Himachal Pradesh** currently has 180 operational hydropower plants, with hundreds more in the pipeline. **Uttarakhand** has 40 plants running and 87 under planning.
 - These projects, combined with road-widening and tunnel construction, use heavy machinery that destabilizes slopes and amplifies disaster risks.
 - Projects under the **Char Dham Pariyojana** and **rampant tunneling** in Uttarakhand increase landslide risks.

- **Tourism Pressure:** Mass tourism in **fragile alpine regions**, especially around **Himachal, Sikkim, and Uttarakhand**, strains local ecosystems.
 - ♦ Solid waste, road expansion, and unregulated resorts accelerate degradation.
- **Sand Mining & Riverbed Exploitation:** Excessive mining of Himalayan rivers reduces water flow, increases flood risk, and disrupts aquatic biodiversity.

Strengthening the Himalayan Ecosystem

- **National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem (NMSHE):** A key mission under the **National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC)**, it promotes research, policy formulation, and capacity building to sustain ecological resilience.
- **National Mission on Himalayan Studies (NMHS):** It supports research and pilot projects across themes like water resource management, biodiversity conservation, climate-resilient infrastructure, and waste handling.
 - ♦ It aligns with **national priorities like 'Lifestyle for Environment (LiFE)'** and global goals such as the SDGs.

Judicial Intervention & Observation

- Recently, the **Supreme Court of India** warned that Himachal Pradesh risked **disappearing 'from the map of India'** if reckless development continued.
 - ♦ It said that the **tunnels along the Chandigarh–Manali highway became 'death traps' during rains.**
- In September, visuals of tree logs floating in floods prompted Justice B.R. Gavai to warn against sacrificing forests and lives for unchecked development.

Pathways for Sustainable Development

- **Development With Context:** Developmental projects need to undergo **lifecycle, disaster, and social impact assessments** before approval, alongside genuine public consultations.
- **Eco-sensitive Zoning:** Limiting construction on fragile slopes.
- **Community-based Tourism Models** with waste management systems.
- **Hydropower Alternatives:** Prioritize micro-hydel projects over mega dams.
- **Climate-resilient Infrastructure:** Incorporate seismic safety and green design.
- **Strengthened Early Warning Systems** for landslides, GLOFs, and flash floods.
- **Strict land-use planning** to prevent unsafe construction.

Source: TH

Daily Mains Practice Question

- Q. Critically examine how rapid development is contributing to the ecological degradation and increased disaster vulnerability of the Himalayan region.

