



Mains Practice Question

Q. Himalaya may be entering a phase of irreversible decline because of losses to its ecology. Discuss in the light of frequent disasters in the region. (250 Words)

13 Aug, 2021 GS Paper 3 Disaster Management

Approach

- Introduce by giving some examples of frequent disasters taking place in the region.
- Discuss the threat/ losses to the Himalayan ecology.
- Enumerate some of the steps taken to save the ecology and reduce the occurrence of frequent natural disasters.
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction

The Himalayan landscape is susceptible to landslides and earthquakes. Formed due to the collision of Indian and Eurasian plates, the northward movement of the former puts continuous stress on the rocks, rendering them weak and prone to landslides and earthquakes.

This, combined with steep slopes, rugged topography, high seismic vulnerability, and rainfall, makes the region one of the most disaster prone areas in the world.

- Nine tourists were killed and three others injured in Himachal Pradesh's Kinnaur district when boulders fell on their vehicle during multiple landslides, triggered by heavy southwest monsoon rains.
- Heavy rain-triggered flash floods in the Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh swept away three people, buildings, and vehicles.
- Uttarakhand too has been affected with natural disasters with the massive flash flood in Chamoli in February 2021 that killed more than 80 people

Body

The Himalayan ecosystem is vulnerable and susceptible to the impacts and consequences of changes on account of causes resulting from developmental paradigms of modern society.

Threat To The Himalayan Ecology

- **Unsustainable Exploitation:** From the mega road expansion project in the name of national security (Char Dham Highway) to building cascading hydroelectric power projects, from unplanned expansion of towns to unsustainable tourism, the Indian States have ignored warnings about the fragile ecology.
 - Such an approach has also led to pollution, deforestation, and water and waste management crises.
- **Threat of Development Activity:** Mega hydropower, which is a significant source of "green" power that substitutes energy from fossil fuels, could alter several aspects of ecology, rendering it

vulnerable to the effects of extreme events such as cloudbursts, flash floods, landslides and earthquakes.

- An incompatible model of development in the hills, represented by big hydroelectric projects and large-scale construction activity involving destruction of forests and damming of rivers, is an invitation to harm.

▪ **Impacts of Global warming on the Himalayan Ecology:**

- With the utter disregard for the fragile topography and climate-sensitive planning, the threat to ecology has increased many folds.
- Glacier melting, resulting in an abrupt rise in water causes floods and impacts the local society.
- Increased incidences of forest fire are also linked with warming of Himalayan region.

▪ **Conversion of forest to agricultural land**, and the exploitation of forests for timber, fodder and fuel wood are some of the main threats to biodiversity in this region.

Steps Can be taken

- **Early Warning System:** It is important to have early warning and better weather forecast systems in order to forecast the disaster and alert the local population and tourists.
- **Regional Cooperation:** There is a need for a trans-boundary coalition of Himalayan countries to share and disseminate knowledge about the mountains and preservation of the ecology there.
- **Area Specific Sustainable Plan:** What is most critical is to review the area's present status and draw up a sustainable plan that respects the specific requirements of this fragile region and the impact of the climate crisis.
- **Promote Ecotourism:** Initiating a dialogue on adverse impacts of commercial tourism and promoting ecotourism.
- **Sustainable Development:** Government must strive for achieving sustainable development not only development that is against the ecology.
 - Detailed Project Reports (DPR), Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) and Social Impact Assessment (SIA) are needed before implementing any project.

Conclusion

From the mega road expansion project in the name of national security to building cascading hydroelectric power projects, from unplanned expansion of towns to unsustainable tourism, the Indian State has ignored warnings about the fragile Himalayan ecology.

The need of the hour is that governments have a changing course to help preserve natural riches including human lives.