



Editorials/Opinions Analyses For UPSC 21 August 2021

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The rumbling hills of Himachal Pradesh

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Context:

As hydro power projects, dams and construction activities are increasing, landslides too are becoming common in Himachal Pradesh, especially in the tribal districts of Lahaul-Spiti and Kinnaur which have seen incessant rains.

Relevance:

GS-III: Environment and Ecology (Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Issues in Himachal Pradesh
2. Role of Climate Change in Increasing the vulnerability of Himachal Pradesh
3. About National Action Plan on Climate Change
4. How to mitigate the vulnerability of Himachal Pradesh?



Issues in Himachal Pradesh

- Deforestation, landslides, land degradation, desertification and Glacier Lake Outbursts Floods are some of the common but critical environmental issues in the Himalayan region and the environment is facing major challenges given the escalation of such issues due to changes in the atmosphere and anthropogenic activities.
- Given the mountainous terrain of Himachal Pradesh, erosion and geological forces make the region prone to natural disasters like landslips, Glacier Lake Outbursts Floods (GLOF) and flooding. As per a report by the Centre for Science and Environment, between July and the first week of August, the State has experienced four major natural disasters leading to loss of life and property.
- While the dams and hydro power projects have brought prosperity to the region, they have also brought suffering.
- During the construction of power projects and dams, the use of rock blasting and heavy machinery in construction sites, besides tree felling, have damaged the fragile hills.
- Besides, scientific disposal of construction debris is not followed.
- The entire stretch of the Sutlej is filled with debris that is thrown into the river from construction sites of power projects, dams and roads.
- There are 932 hydropower projects in Himachal Pradesh, which include mini, small, large, and mega projects. Most of these projects are in Kinnaur, Chamba and Shimla districts. While there is plenty of evidence on how these calamities are not natural but such evidence is not considered in policy decisions. Which is why governments continue pushing for more hydro power projects and four-lane highways.

Role of climate change in increasing the vulnerability of Himachal Pradesh:

- The increasing number of landslips and other natural disasters being observed in Himachal Pradesh has raised concerns that they are part of a larger climate shift.
- The recent sixth assessment report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warns that a global rise of 1.5 degrees Celsius (from pre-industrial times) is inevitable in the next two decades. This degree of global warming will lead to increased glacier melt as well as snowlines rising higher and will only increase the frequency as well as the intensity of extreme weather events like more intense bouts of droughts as well as short, intense spells of rain.

Climate change manifestation in Himachal Pradesh:



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- The temperature in the north-west Himalayan Region has risen by 1.6 degrees Celsius in the last century. The capital city of Shimla is observing increasing temperature and decreasing rainfall and seasonal snowfall.
 - The discharge pattern in the major river systems in the state is witnessing changes.
 - The quality of apples, a major crop of the region has been affected. Incidences of pests and diseases have also increased.

About National Action Plan on Climate Change

- The National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) was launched in 2008 by the Prime Minister's Council on Climate Change.
- It aims at creating awareness among the representatives of the public, different agencies of the government, scientists, industry and the communities on the threat posed by climate change and the steps to counter it.
- There are 8 national missions forming the core of the NAPCC which represent multi-pronged, long term and integrated strategies for achieving key goals in climate change. These are-
 1. National Solar Mission
 2. National Mission for Enhanced Energy Efficiency
 3. National Mission on Sustainable Habitat
 4. National Water Mission
 5. National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem
 6. National Mission for A Green India
 7. National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture
 8. National Mission on Strategic Knowledge for Climate Change

How to mitigated the vulnerability of Himachal Pradesh?

- Though a small Himalayan State, Himachal Pradesh, is playing a very crucial role in sustaining the livelihoods of downstream areas.
- The conservation, sustenance of these ecologically fragile regions is the biggest challenge being faced at the moment which can get further aggravated due to financial constraints and limited resources.
- Development has become a double-edged sword.
- While it is a fact that road connectivity is the key for the tourism sector to flourish, converting single roads into double lanes could not be the best way forward.
- Additionally, when roads are constructed, debris is thrown into the valley and falls into the rivers. The government should focus on the maintenance of existing roads instead of opting for unregulated development.
- The government to review its policy on hydro power projects.



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- While the decision to set up power projects is taken in national interest, the concerns of people are to be understood and addressed. A balance has to be struck between national interest and the concerns of the local people. There is a need for a consensus with the locals before setting up a project.

-Source: The Hindu

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