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A Dangerous March Towards a Himalayan Ecocide

Context

- The year 2025 marked a turning point as **climate** extremes intensified across India.
- With nearly 331 days of cascading impacts and more than 4,000 deaths, **disasters** became a near-continuous reality.
- The **Himalayas**, among the world's most fragile mountain systems, suffered disproportionate losses, with towns such as Dharali, Harsil, Uttarkashi, Chamoli, Kullu, Mandi and Kishtwar repeatedly struck by cloudbursts, avalanches and flash **floods**.
- These events underscore that ecological instability is no longer episodic but structural, demanding a reassessment of how **infrastructure** is planned in sensitive regions.

Infrastructure Expansion in a Disaster Zone

- A central example is the Char Dham road-widening project.
- In November 2025, approval was granted to divert 43 hectares of forest land in the Dharali-Harsil region for the **Char Dham** project, including extensive muck dumping.
- Nearly 7,000 **Devdar** trees were marked for felling in an area already devastated by an avalanche-turned-flash flood.
- The project follows the DL-PS standard, enforcing a 12-metre-wide paved road despite repeated scientific warnings.
- Geologically, the region lies north of the Main Central Thrust, a zone where large-scale construction is discouraged due to unstable **geology**.
- The landscape is further destabilised by hanging **glaciers**, many fed by the rapidly retreating Gangotri Glacier.
- Moraine-laden ice bodies increase the probability of slope failure, as demonstrated by the glacier avalanche that triggered the Dharali disaster.
- Proceeding with large infrastructure under such conditions reflects a failure of basic risk **assessment**.

Ecological Value of Devdar Forests

- The threatened **forests** perform irreplaceable ecological functions in the Himalayan landscape.
- Their deep root systems stabilise slopes, reduce erosion and significantly lower the incidence of **landslides** and debris flows.

- Removing them directly increases downstream hazard exposure.
- These forests also safeguard the upper reaches of the **Ganga**, as they fall within the Bhagirathi Eco-Sensitive Zone.
- Their antimicrobial properties, derived from complex organic compounds, regulate riverine microbial communities and support aquatic **biodiversity**.
- By maintaining cooler microclimates, Devdar forests regulate snowmelt-fed streams, sustain dissolved oxygen levels and preserve the river's ecological character.
- Large-scale **deforestation** would initiate irreversible changes, including higher water temperatures, reduced oxygen content and the collapse of natural self-purification processes.
- Proposals to translocate centuries-old Devdars ignore their site-specific ecological roles; uprooting them is functionally equivalent to destruction.

A Project Built on Structural and Procedural Flaws

- The road-widening initiative illustrates how not to build in the Himalayas.
- Environmental safeguards were bypassed through fragmented clearances, incorrect road-width standards and destabilising vertical hill-cutting.
- Excavated debris was dumped indiscriminately into streams, compounding damage.
- The outcomes are visible along nearly 700 kilometres of roadway, where more than 800 active landslide zones now exist.
- Key routes remain frequently closed, undermining the project's promise of all-weather connectivity.
- Retrofitting slopes with bolts and wire mesh, proposed years after destabilisation began, fails to address the root problem: slopes cut beyond their natural angle of repose.

Policy Contradictions and Governance Failures

- Current practices directly contradict the National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem, a **policy** framework designed to protect mountain **ecology**, mitigate hazards and guide sustainable livelihoods.
- This contradiction reveals systemic **governance** failures, where short-term connectivity goals override long-term safety.
- Unsafe land use, wide highways on unstable slopes, tunnels without adequate surveys and large hydropower projects, has repeatedly been flagged by regulatory bodies.
- While such activities act as immediate triggers, accelerated **warming** functions as a risk multiplier.
- High-altitude regions have warmed significantly faster than the global average, intensifying rainfall variability, glacial melt and extreme events.
- These pressures are amplified by unregulated **tourism**, unchecked traffic and the absence of carrying-capacity planning.
- Together, they erode ecological **resilience** and expose communities to escalating hazards.

Conclusion

- The continuing crisis reinforces a fundamental truth: without the Himalayas, there is no India. The range underpins water security, climate regulation and cultural continuity.

- Persisting with vulnerable models of **development** undermines national security rather than strengthening it.
- Disaster-resilient planning rooted in science, **sustainability** and accountability is not optional, it is essential.
- Failing to act ensures that loss, displacement and instability will intensify, demanding urgent **accountability** from those shaping the future of this irreplaceable landscape.

A Dangerous March Towards a Himalayan Ecocide FAQs

Q1. Why is the Himalayan region especially vulnerable to disasters?
Ans. The Himalayan region is highly vulnerable due to fragile geology, accelerating climate warming, and unsafe infrastructure development.

Q2. What makes Devdar forests ecologically important?
Ans. Devdar forests stabilise slopes, reduce landslides, and protect the ecological health of the Ganga river system.

Q3. Why is the Char Dham road project considered risky?
Ans. The project involves excessive road widening and construction in a geologically unstable and disaster-prone zone.

Q4. How does climate change intensify Himalayan disasters?
Ans. Climate change increases erratic rainfall, accelerates glacial melt, and magnifies the severity of extreme weather events.

Q5. What is the core governance failure highlighted in the analysis?
Ans. The central governance failure is prioritising short-term development over long-term ecological resilience and safety.

Source: **The Hindu**

BRICS India Summit Needs a Green and Resilient Agenda

Context

- The forthcoming **BRICS** Summit to be hosted by **India** offers a critical opportunity to align national priorities with the urgent needs of the **Global South**.
- With the successful organisation of the G-20 Summit in 2023, India already has the infrastructure and diplomatic capacity required.
- The central challenge now lies in defining a focus that resonates across member states while addressing global developmental concerns.
- The growing **climate** crisis and the need for enhanced **resilience** provide a unifying and strategic agenda, particularly for developing countries that are disproportionately affected by climate impacts.

The Global Context: A Leadership Vacuum in Climate Governance

- Global **multilateralism** is under severe strain amid heightened geopolitical polarisation.
- The **United States**, under the influence of **Trump**-era policies, has deprioritised climate action, promoted increased **fossil** fuel usage, and withdrawn from multiple international initiatives.
- This retreat has weakened global momentum on **sustainability**, especially as the U.S. has distanced itself from climate forums and institutions central to collective action.
- At the same time, European countries that previously positioned themselves as climate leaders are experiencing domestic fatigue and shifting their attention toward security and economic concerns.
- This convergence of disengagement among major developed economies has created a leadership vacuum in global climate governance.
- Within this context, BRICS has the potential to emerge as a stabilising platform capable of sustaining cooperation on climate action and development-oriented responses.

BRICS as a Platform for Collective Climate Action

- While BRICS is often viewed with suspicion in Washington, India’s diplomatic strength lies in its ability to balance competing interests.
- Its performance during the G-20 Summit demonstrated a capacity to navigate complex global **geopolitics** while preserving strategic autonomy through multi-alignment.
- A similar approach at the BRICS Summit can advance climate cooperation without undermining crucial bilateral relationships.
- Climate impacts affect all BRICS countries, though in diverse ways. These include risks to infrastructure, public health, ecosystems, and livelihoods across varied geographies.
- Such shared vulnerabilities strengthen the case for collective action focused on **adaptation**, **equity**, and sustainable **development**, ensuring that climate responses do not constrain growth prospects for developing economies.

Reinforcing and Expanding Climate Coalitions

- Within the **UNFCCC**, groupings such as **BASIC** have historically played a vital role in articulating developing country concerns.
- However, the expanded BRICS grouping brings greater political and economic weight, enabling stronger coordination among major developing nations.
- This collective influence has already proven effective in safeguarding development priorities during recent climate negotiations.
- Several BRICS members have also played key roles in sustaining the global climate process in the post-Paris Agreement period by presiding over major climate conferences.
- Additionally, BRICS can provide a coordinated response to unilateral measures that bypass multilateral principles, particularly those that link climate policy with trade restrictions.

Climate Finance: The Central Enabler

- Access to adequate **finance** remains the cornerstone of effective climate action.

- The BRICS Leaders' Framework Declaration on Climate Finance adopted in 2025 underscored the urgency of mobilising resources for developing countries.
- India has consistently emphasised that climate commitments must be matched by financial support that reflects historical responsibilities and present capacities.
- Meaningful progress in this area requires engagement beyond BRICS institutions such as the **New Development Bank**.
- Inclusion of the **World Bank** and the **IMF** is essential, given their central role in global financial flows.
- Treating these institutions as external or exclusive to developed blocs would limit the effectiveness of any climate finance strategy.
- This engagement is particularly important in light of declining private-sector interest in climate-related investments, including **ESG**

India's Strategic and Geopolitical Opportunity

- The expanded BRICS grouping now represents a significant share of the global population, economic output, and trade flows.
- As chair, India is uniquely positioned to shape a collective agenda that prioritises climate **resilience** and inclusive growth.
- Such leadership would reinforce India's global standing while addressing the pressing vulnerabilities of developing nations.
- Geopolitically, a strong BRICS-led climate initiative also serves to balance competing ambitions, particularly those of **China**, in shaping the global climate **leadership**
- By advancing a development-centric **green** agenda that emphasises resilience and cooperation, India can ensure that climate action remains inclusive, equitable, and aligned with the long-term interests of the Global South.

Conclusion

- The upcoming BRICS Summit represents a strategic moment for India to influence the trajectory of global climate governance.
- By foregrounding resilience and inclusive development, India can position BRICS as a stabilising force amid global uncertainty, strengthen cooperation among developing nations.
- India's leadership can also contribute to a more balanced and sustainable international order, one that integrates climate action with growth, equity, and **trade**.

BRICS India Summit Needs a Green and Resilient Agenda FAQs

Q1. Why is climate resilience an appropriate focus for the BRICS Summit hosted by India?

Ans. Climate resilience addresses the shared vulnerabilities of the Global South and aligns with India's leadership on inclusive and sustainable development.

Q2. How has global climate governance been weakened in recent years?
Ans. Global climate governance has weakened due to reduced commitment by major powers, geopolitical

polarisation, and declining multilateral cooperation.

Q3. What role can BRICS play in the current international climate landscape?
Ans. BRICS can act as a stabilising platform that sustains collective climate action and protects development priorities of emerging economies.

Q4. Why is climate finance central to effective climate action for developing countries?
Ans. Climate finance enables adaptation, mitigation, and resilience-building without constraining economic growth in developing nations.

Q5. How does India benefit geopolitically from leading a BRICS climate agenda?
Ans. India strengthens its global leadership, balances competing powers, and advances the interests of the Global South through cooperative climate diplomacy.

Source: The Hindu

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