International Mountain Day: Afforestation initiatives repair the Himalayan ecosystem

Augmented green cover is vital for countering the impact of global warming

According to eco-scientists, the **Himalayas**, the biodiversity hotspot home to thousands of species of plants, birds and mammals, play a crucial role in regulating India's environmental and climatic conditions. However, these mountains face increasing threats from **climate change, overexploitation and pollution,** which endanger biodiversity and the well-being of people reliant on them. Highlighting these challenges on International Mountain Day (December 11), environmentalists say that enhancing forest cover can be one of the most cost-effective and practical measures to mitigate the impacts of climate change. This is particularly important in the Himalayan region, where forests are essential for carbon absorption and storage, holding approximately 62 per cent of the region's total carbon.

> *"The Indian Himalayas region has been experiencing warming rates higher than the global average, leading to the rapid melting of glaciers at an accelerating pace. This is directly linked to the significant loss of forest cover, with Himalayan states in India reporting a loss of 1,072 square kilometres of forest," says environmental champion* Pradip Shah, *co-founder of the social enterprise Grow-Trees.com.*
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> *Considering the importance of afforestation efforts in the region, Mr Shah says that Grow-Trees.com has already launched the 'Trees+ for the Himalayas project,' which is being implemented in 17 villages in Nainital and six villages in Almora, Uttarakhand. Four lakh trees, including Amla, Banj, Bakian, Bhatula, Bhimal, Majuna, Glaucus Oak, Jamun, Himalayan Mulberry and Indian Horse Chestnut, will be planted under the initiative.*
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> *"Such projects focusing on the Himalayan region can help sequester carbon and enhance the resilience of local ecosystems. Extending forest cover also helps reduce the region's vulnerability to the accelerating impacts of climate change. By actively engaging local communities in every step of the tree planting process, we can also ensure the protection of mountain ranges for future generations," adds Mr Shah.*
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> *On the transformative impact of the project on local communities,* Pramod Kumar, Range Officer of Nathuwakhan village, *says that the initiative has not only beautified the landscape but also provided employment opportunities for many villagers. "The plantation has helped replenish the forest cover, which in turn has improved the region's biodiversity. We need more such initiatives to create a positive impact on our community, "adds the officer.*

A **52-year-old resident of Bareth village, Bhim Singh**, believes that Trees+ for the Himalayas project has greatly benefited his community. "It has provided a source of income and helped support our livelihoods along with increasing the forest cover in our area, which is vital for the environment. We are happy that we were able to contribute to nature through such plantation activities," adds Bhim Singh.