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Uttarakhand forest fires sign of climate crisis

The 'development' assault on the Himalayan ecosystem is taking its toll

The forest fires which started in Uttarakhand's Kumaon region a week ago are still raging, causing serious damage to nature and to life and property. Over 1,000 hectares of forests have been affected and the fire has come close to the state's capital, Nainital. It poses a threat to inhabited areas. The government has declared an emergency situation and various agencies, including the central and state disaster management teams, the Army and the Air Force, are fighting the fire. Over 30 incidents have been reported from different parts of the state and the forces are stretched thin trying to put out the various fires. Uttarakhand has been reporting recurring forest fires for many months. The state has seen devastation caused by the continuous assault on nature, and the forest fires are another sign of the crumbling of nature. Climate change has added to the severity of the problem. Hundreds of hectares of forests have been affected.

Forest fires are not specific to Uttarakhand. Their extent and severity have been increasing. According to Forest Survey of India (FSI) data, the number of fires between April 20 and April 27 this year was three times more than during the same period last year. They were reported from all parts of the country, including Karnataka. Last week, three instances of forest fire were reported from the Biligiri Tiger Reserve. There were major incidents of fire in several other forest areas of the state in the last few years. The last winter was drier than in the past and the ongoing summer has been hotter. The decrease in the natural moisture in the air and on the ground allows the fire to spread. These have made the environment prone to fires. They are sometimes caused by natural factors but more often by actions related to human negligence.

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There is loss of life and property in Uttarakhand though the exact impact is yet to be estimated. At least five deaths have been reported in the last three days. A smog has enveloped Nainital and it has caused serious health problems for people, especially for those suffering from asthma and other lung-related ailments. The economy of the state, which depends on tourism as a major source of income, will be affected by the recurrent forest fires. Forests are an important part of the climate system. Climate and weather changes caused by human actions trigger forest fires, which in turn aggravate the climate crisis. Forest conservation gets only lip service and even government actions and laws do damage to forests. There are some more weeks of summer ahead and there should be special attention to avert large first fires.

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Uttarakhand

Forest Fire

Opinion

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