# Action-time alert on Himalayas

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**Antalya (Turkey):** Climate change is inflicting irreversible damage on the Himalayas and mountain disasters should be treated not just as a wake-up call but as a sign to act, experts from mountain nations have said at the ongoing global climate summit (COP31) here.

"A series of devastating mountain disasters across the Hindu Kush Himalaya has exposed growing climate risks, gaps in preparedness, and the urgent need for stronger international cooperation, funding and action," the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) pointed out based on talks at a key meeting at COP31 on Sunday.

The ICIMOD is a regional intergovernmental centre with representations from eight member countries spanning the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) region — Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan.

"Every time there's a disaster in the Himalayas, we tend to call it a wake-up call.... The question before us is: what will it take for us to wake up and take action?" Pema Gyamtsho, director-general of ICIMOD, said, adding that recognition without response would not protect Himalayan communities from future disasters.

"We had a meeting with the presidency and shared a joint Nepal-Bhutan submission about mountain-related agendas before COP31 started. While a few agendas have been accommodated in the presidency discussion involving all parties, others have been left out. Unless COP31 responds appropriately to the mountain risk of the region, including Nepal, Bhutan and India, it may turn out to be more devastating," Manjit Dhakal, a key negotiator from Nepal and head of the LDC (least developed countries) support team, told **The Telegraph** on Sunday.

Dhakal said they were targeting both bilateral and multilateral sources such as the Global Climate Fund to generate funds for vulnerable mountain countries.

The "more disaster in the pipeline" warning comes less than three months after a catastrophic rock-and-ice collapse in Nepal that caused widespread destruction, deaths and economic losses in August. In October, another ice-rock avalanche struck Nepal's Gorkha district, while a glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) in Bhutan's Shintaphu region demolished roads, bridges and livelihoods downstream.

Several speakers at the ICIMOD meeting said these were not isolated events but signs of a changing mountain risk landscape that threatened communities, infrastructure, water security and economies



**An area covered in mud and silt following the flash flood in Nuwakot, Nepal, on August 27**

across the region.

India has recorded the highest glacial flood death toll and the most severe GLOF-related displacement in the HKH region, according to a UN-led global report.

"States across the Indian Himalayas, particularly Sikkim, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Bengal, Assam, and Jammu and Kashmir, stand most vulnerable to expanding glacial lakes," a senior disaster management expert, who did not wish to be identified, said.

"The Himalayas are often seen as a Shangri-La, a place of peace and meditation... But climate change is affecting us, and that Shangri-La is under threat," said Sonam Tashi, director of the department of environment and climate change in the Bhutan government.

"The flood surge reached the border corridor within minutes, highlighting how rapidly mountain hazards can move across national boundaries and overwhelm conventional warning systems. Hence, we need stronger transboundary monitoring, real-time exchange of hazard information, coordinated early warning systems and improved cooperation among countries sharing mountain ecosystems and river basins," an ICIMOD representative said.

The panel also drew attention to new findings from a recent joint report by the International Cryosphere Climate Initiative (ICCI) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) that breaching the 1.5°C global warming threshold would lead to irreversible loss of snow and ice, increasing the risks of floods, water insecurity and mountain hazards for generations.

"Nepal estimates it needs over $4.7 billion to get back on its feet. The Fund to Respond to Loss and Damage last month only approved $21.6 million, funding that will not even be disbursed immediately. Research shows that nearly two-thirds of the international climate finance allocated to Nepal between 2016 and 2023 was in concessional loans, with only about 30 per cent in grants," a statement by the Global Campaign to Demand Climate Justice said on Saturday.

It underlined the importance of appropriate and quick grants from the international community to prevent Nepal from getting sucked into the swivel of climate-linked debt.