

The Melting Goes On

They call it Glaciergate. In the face of adverse criticism from different quarters Rajendra Pachauri, the chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was quick enough to apologise for including in the Panel's fourth assessment report of 2007, the claim that Himalayan glaciers would disappear by 2035. No, they are now trying hard to revise their earlier stand and convince the world that it may take 300 years for global warming to take its toll. It may be a good news for those who admit global warming exists but put forward lukewarm patchwork answers that don't seriously address the enormity of the problem. But 'sceptics' refuse to be encouraged by the corrigendum offered by IPCC. Only vested interests find the ray of hope in Pachauri's 'mistake' because they are basically concerned with preserving the existing system than with saving the planet. Different forces, particularly major global players spread lies about and deny reality of global warming. If business-as-usual perception about global warming doesn't change dramatically the prospects of which seem bleak in the immediate future, 'climate change' will change the world to one where no one would want to, and may not be able to, live in.

In the wake of 'glacier-melting' controversy, the world glacier monitoring service (WGMS) didn't really paint a rosy picture even for the die-hard optimists. Pachauri's rejoinder or no rejoinder, glaciers across the globe are continuing to melt so fast that many will disappear by the middle of this century. So says the WGMS report.

The announcement of the latest annual results from monitoring in nine mountain ranges only confirms the idea that the situation is literally going out of control. And no less a person than the director of WGMS, Professor Wilfried Haeberli said the other day the latest global results indicated most glaciers were continuing to melt at historically high rates. Maybe, IPCC is now busy to defend the indefensible and reverse the irreversible. Denial doesn't mean Himalayan glaciers are doing just fine. They aren't, and there may be serious consequences for water resources as the retreat continues. As per the WGMS data the average reduction in thickness across all the 96 major glaciers was nearly half a metre, and since 1980 they have collectively lost an average of 13m thickness. The current debate over Himalayan glaciers is unlikely to subside because ambiguity doesn't make the danger less serious.

Climate change represents a real threat to the existence of humanity, of living being and the 'Mother Earth' as people know it today. Islands, coastal areas, mangrove forests in the Bengal delta glaciers in the Himalayas, the Andes and mountains of the world, poles of the earth, warm regions like Africa, water sources—all are threatened.

Those most affected by climate change will be the poorest in the world who will see their homes and their sources of livelihood destroyed, and who will be forced to migrate and seek shelter elsewhere, fuelling regional conflicts and even civil wars. As the Copenhagen Summit failed to produce a rational consensus the government of Plurinational state of Bolivia called on the peoples of the world, social movements and Mother Earth's defenders and invited scientists, academics, lawyers and governments that want to work with their citizens to the

People's World Conference on climate change and Mother Earth's Rights to be held from 20th to 22nd April 2010 in Cochabamba, Bolivia. It remains to be seen whether Bolivia's efforts can generate enthusiasm for a mass climate movement at international level without which major powers—major polluters—won't listen. In truth they are not listening at the moment while playing with the gallery, doing everything possible to minimise the danger. Strange it may seem China reportedly offered to build hospitals and schools in Burundi in exchange of its support to the unbinding Copenhagen accord. No doubt the Copenhagen conference has put China on a higher and broader world stage but poor third world countries that are immediately threatened by climate change and glacier melting have reasons to be sceptical about its role in building a fair deal on climate change.

Activists throughout the world have been calling for strong climate action ever since the UN Earth Summit in 1992 without much success. Whether they could articulate scattered initiatives after the Copenhagen fiasco is the life and death question for millions. 75% of historical emissions of Green House gases originated in the North that followed a path of irrational industrialisation. Unless atmospheric CO₂ concentrations get reduced to 350 ppm the idea of limiting the earth's eventual global temperature to 1.5 degrees celcius will remain a pipe dream. Countries known as 'developed' failed to recognise the climate debt they have with developing countries and future generations. In other words they never agreed not to murder others. Maybe, there is a concerted campaign to postpone the possibilities of major droughts, loss of farmland, and food shortages through the Glaciergate controversy but the ground reality won't change despite dozens of rejoinders. □□□

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