

Are we prepared to take up the "near future disaster"?

Opinions

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IPCC's recent predictions on the elevation of global temperature and the rise in the sea level in this century gives us only little time to make the necessary precautions. How far we are prepared to take up this challenge?. C.T. Aravindakumar writes.

IPCC's recent predictions on the elevation of global temperature and the rise in the sea level in this century gives us only little time to make the necessary precautions. How far we are prepared to take up this challenge? The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in its fourth assessment report hints at the growing concern over various human activities which lead to the enhanced release of greenhouse gases (GHGs) to the atmosphere. The summary for policy makers (SPM) of the Working Group I which was published on 2 February 2007 and revised on 5 February 2007, has highlighted the following points:

I. The major greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide, trap heat in the Earth's atmosphere;

This is actually a natural process. However, the very noticeable increase in these GHGs

over the past 50 years is the result of human activity. The amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere in 2005 "exceeds

II. Warming of the climate is unequivocal III. The resulting hike in the atmospheric temperature and the rise in sea level are expected to continue for centuries, even if we control the level of pollution. At the same time, the amount of temperature and the extent of the sea level rise varies greatly depending on the intensity of human activities. IV. World temperature is expected to rise between 1.1 and 6.4 0C (i.e., 1.98 and 11.52 0F) in this century. The sea level may rise by 18-59 cm. There may be more frequent warm spells, heat waves and heavy rainfall. There may be an increase in droughts, cyclones and extreme high tides. V. The carbon dioxide, one of the GHGs, will continue to be the major cause of global warming and sea level rise for more than a millennium. The most important message from the above conclusions of IPCC is that we can no longer "take it easy" as in the past. *"The Halifax Travel Insurance Holiday 2030 report reveals that by 2030 global average temperatures are likely to be at least 1°C higher and possibly as much as 2°C. By 2030 global sea levels could be 72 mm higher but accelerated melting of the Greenland and West Antarctic ice sheets could contribute to levels of 25cm. Every one mm sea-level rise translates into 1.5 metre retreat of the shoreline. This means by 2030 shorelines could be expected to have retreated by at least 108m, and possibly by up to 375m, equivalent to the height of the Empire State building. This would wipe out beaches across the globe and coastal amenities such as hotels, golf courses and retail facilities would be threatened. This report further predicts a fundamental shift in holiday destinations in less than 25 years with a reversal of the traditional trend for north to south "migration" that accounts for 70 percent of all international travel. By 2030 the traditional British package holiday to a Mediterranean beach resort may be consigned to the scrap-heap of history replaced by a rise in tourists staying at home or engaging in health, cultural, sports and "beauty" tourism. Increased temperatures will make Southern European beach destinations, such as Majorca and Ibiza, too hot for many travelers. Holidaymakers will be*

switching their main holidays from the summer to the winter and spring as they will be discouraged from traveling to southern European resorts by increased drought, flash floods and the loss of coastal real estate such as hotels, resorts and golf courses.” Well, loosing of tourist destination may not be a major worry of majority of people, the elevation of sea level and the subsequent loss of sea shore will be a major crisis in any country. The major sufferer will be the poor countries. Millions of people live very close to the sea. India is one of the best examples for this kind of situation. According to the Halifax Travel Insurance Holiday 2030 report, main impact of climate change on Goa will result from rising sea levels, with this very flat, low-lying area extremely susceptible to even the smallest rise. “By 2030, beach erosion and inundation of shoreline properties is likely to be a real problem. Kerala is also low-lying and susceptible to rising sea levels, and is likely to encounter similar problems, although due to its size less people will be affected. Nevertheless, the coastal zones that support much of the tourist trade will suffer increasingly from beach erosion and inundation in the run-up to 2030 and beyond. Both Goa and Kerala are within the Indian Ocean’s cyclone belt, and will be affected by the increase in the number of more powerful cyclones predicted to occur due to climate change; a trend that may already be apparent. This will raise the probability of wind damage and coastal flooding due to storm surges, exacerbating further the problems caused by rising sea levels. Climate change may also result in a more unpredictable Monsoon, leading, on the one hand to severe flooding, and on the other to periods of extended drought, causing water shortages.” This is really a worrying situation. The recent Tsunami hit in the costal area of southern India left thousands homeless. The Govt had a tough time (even now) to replace the affected in proper places. The situation in the present context will be definitely very different as this is a slow process (it takes 2-3 decades), the disaster expected from the rise in water level will have similar impact in terms of loss of land and associated issues. According to Dr. Rajendra Pachauri, Chairman of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), India is completely unprepared for the effects of climate change that could lead to widespread flooding and drought. On a scale of 0 to 10, India’s preparedness is 0.5, he stated in a press conference on April 10. The IPCC’s assessment report ‘Climate Change 2007: Impact, Adaptation and Vulnerability’, which was released worldwide, clearly stresses that many of the regions facing the greatest risks are among the world’s poorest. Many studies including the recent report in Science, hints at increased storms and other extreme weather events across the world. Rise of sea level, floods, droughts….. any of these natural calamity matters a lot for any country. Tremendous efforts will be needed to face all these calamities. The disaster is not very far away, but in the close vicinity!!. (Ref: IPCC website, SciDev.Net)