

Asia Must Act Fast to Lessen Climate Change – Report

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LONDON - Asia, home to nearly two-thirds of the world's people, must take urgent action to lessen the effects of climate change but needs considerable help from rich nations elsewhere, a report said on Monday.

"Up in Smoke? Asia and the Pacific," the last in a series of reports from the New Economics Foundation (NEF) think-tank, appears just after leading scientists said the effects of global warming would be all-pervasive and irreversible.

"Wealthy industrialised countries must act first and fastest to cut greenhouse gas emissions, but emerging Asian countries also need to contribute to climate change mitigation," it said.

The report called for sustainable development policies including ending deforestation and promoting energy efficiency and environmentally sensible renewable energy sources, and said booming palm oil production posed a problem in this regard.

More than half Asia's four billion people live near the coast, making them highly vulnerable to rising sea levels from melting glaciers, and all are open to the vagaries of the water cycle affecting food production, it said.

"It has become clear that Asia will see some major changes as a result of climate change, and several of these are becoming evident already," Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) head Rajendra Pachauri wrote in the report.

"Even more compelling are the projections of future climate change and associated impacts in Asia," he added.

The IPCC, which won the Nobel Peace Prize this year along with former US vice president Al Gore, issued the leading scientists' warning that climate change was irreversible.

DIRTY AIR, POLLUTED WATER

The NEF echoed the message in its report on Asia, saying climate change was likely to have a dire effect on air quality and to increase the pollution and scarcity of water, while the rising population put growing demands on scarce resources.

The report said Asia contained nearly 90 percent of the world's small farms -- China accounting for half and India one quarter -- which produced much of the food but faced major climate change-induced difficulties.

"To cope with a changing environment, Asian small-scale agriculture will need dramatically increased support," it said.

The report, like that of the IPCC, is aimed at a meeting of UN environment ministers next month on the Indonesian island of Bali whose subject is climate change and how to deal with it.

The goal of the Dec 3-14 Bali meeting is to agree to start urgent talks on a successor to the Kyoto Protocol on cutting carbon gas emissions, which expires in 2012.

Scientists say there is no time left for failure, either in Bali or in the global negotiations the Bali talks should launch.

"There are less than 10 years before global emissions must start to decline; instead, emissions from Britain and other wealthy industrialised countries are still rising remorselessly," the NEF said.

Officials involved in preliminary discussions say the mood about the Bali meeting is good, but many major problems remain and there is no certainty of a positive outcome. (Reporting by Jeremy Lovell; editing by Tim Pearce)