

Millions Could Suffer From Melting Ice

The melting of the Earth's ice has accelerated in recent decades, an alarming phenomenon that could affect hundreds of millions of people across the world, the United Nations warned in a report.

"The futures of hundreds of millions of people across the world will be affected by declines in snow cover, sea ice, glaciers, permafrost and lake ice," the Global Outlook for Ice and Snow report, published on the eve of World Environment Day, reported AFP.

"Impacts are likely to include significant changes in the availability of water supplies for drinking and agriculture, rising sea levels affecting low lying coasts and islands and an increase in hazards such as subsidence of currently frozen land," it said.

The Arctic ice sheet has shrunk by six to seven percent in winter and by 10 to 12 percent in summer over the past 30 years, the report said.

The snow-covered regions of the northern hemisphere have reduced by between seven and 10 percent during March and April during the same period, according to the report presented by the UN Environment Program (UNEP).

The melting of the ice and snow is not only a consequence of global warming, it is also an accelerating factor, researchers presenting the report in the Norwegian Arctic town of Tromsø said.

"Snow and ice reflect 70 to 80 percent of the sun's energy, whereas water absorbs it. If snow and ice continue to melt, this will amplify global warming," report author Paal Prestud told journalists.

"Six and a half billion people on this planet have built their way of life...around a certain reality. This reality is changing even more rapidly than expected," UNEP executive director Achim Steiner added.

The acceleration process also makes it more difficult to anticipate future developments, he said.

"(This process) is of such magnitude that our ability to predict the future is severely constrained," Steiner said.

"This means that the adaptation process of coping with climate change is potentially so far-reaching in terms of economic costs and consequences that we have to act now," he added.

For instance, an estimated 40 percent of the world's population could be affected by the loss of snow and glaciers on the mountains of Asia, according to researchers.

Many rivers of the continent, such as the Ganges, the Brahmaputra or the Mekong, rise in the Himalayas and less ice and snow would mean less water for drinking and agriculture.

Rising sea levels would affect low-lying coasts and islands, something of particular concern for countries such as Bangladesh and Indonesia.

Melting ice and snow were considered more likely to increase hazards such as avalanches and floods from the build-up of potentially unstable glacial lakes.

Rising temperatures and the thawing of permafrost, or frozen land, were also triggering the expansion of existing lakes and the emergence of new lakes and rivers in places like Siberia.



An iceberg carved from a glacier floats in the Jacobshavn fjord in southwest Greenland, Sep 20, 2006.

Indonesian Forests Threatened

It's one of the few countries that still has vast swaths of tropical rainforests left.

But conservationists say maybe not for long.

Indonesia's rainforests—especially those on Borneo island—are being stripped so rapidly because of illegal logging and palm oil plantations for bio-fuels, they could be wiped out altogether within the next

15 years, some environmentalists say.

"Sixty percent of the protected and conservation areas are already badly damaged due to illegal logging and palm oil plantations," Rully Sumada, a forestry expert with Indonesian environmental group Walhi, told Reuters.

"The deforestation speed is 2.8 million hectares a year. At this rate, by 2012

the forests in Sumatra, Borneo and Sulawesi will be gone, only the forests in Papua will be left. And if cutting of trees carries on, no forest will be left by 2022."

Indonesia has a total forest area of more than 225 million acres, or about 10 percent of the world's remaining tropical forest, according to Rainforestweb.org, a por-

tal on rainforests.

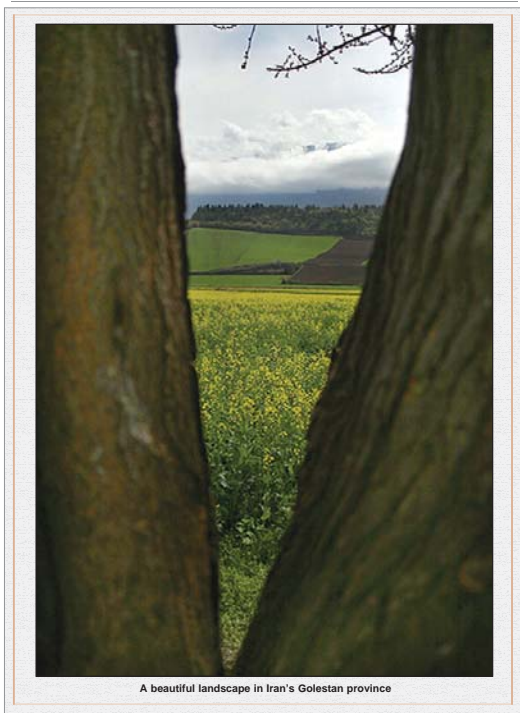
But the tropical Southeast Asian country—whose forests are a treasure trove of plant and animal species including the endangered orangutans—has already lost an estimated 72 percent of its original frontier forest.

The biggest threat to the forests of Borneo, and also Aceh on the northernmost tip of Sumatra Island, is from illegal logging.

A recent report by the Environmental Investigation Agency and Indonesia-based Telapak said that Malaysia and China were major recipients of stolen Indonesian timber and that shipping companies from Singapore carried such wood overseas.

Indian proverb :

Only when the last tree has died and the last river been poisoned and the last fish been caught will we realize we cannot eat money.



A beautiful landscape in Iran's Golestan province

Chad Protecting Elephants

Chad's President Idriss Deby Itno has detached 400 regular army soldiers to defend the remnants of a once-thriving elephant population decimated by poachers, the country's top conservation official said.

"The soldiers are taking positions in and around Zakouma National Park as we speak," Abakar Mahamat Zougoulou, who is in The Hague to attend a meeting of the international body that regulates the trade of endangered species, told AFP.

"Twenty years ago we had 40,000 elephants," said Zougoulou, whose main mission at the 171-nation Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is to lobby and vote for a 20-year, worldwide ban on the trade in ivory.

"Today we have less than 6,000,

and the decline is almost entirely due to poaching. The moratorium is our best hope to reconstitute our elephant patrimony," he said.

American conservationist and ecologist Michael Fay estimates that the number of elephants in a region bridging southern Sudan, southeastern Chad, and eastern Central African Republic has dwindled since the 1970s from several hundred thousand to less than 10,000.

Zakouma Park at the southern end of Chad is not big by wildlife refuge standards, covering just over 3,000 square kilometers (1,200 square miles). But it is still too much ground to secure for Zougoulou's 89 guards, who are being killed off along with the elephants they are trying to defend.

"I have lost seven guards over the last year," Zougoulou said in an interview. "They simply can't cope with poachers who are

increasingly well armed and numerous." Beginning two years ago, he explained, poachers began using heavy arms, including M14 assault rifles and AK-47s. During the most recent attack, they showed up in regular army uniforms.

Twenty African nations led by Kenya and Mali have called for a 20-year moratorium on trade in ivory, arguing that a total ban is the only way to guarantee the long-term survival of the species.

Limited trade simply encourages poaching and smuggling, they say, pointing to a sharp increase in illegal commerce since occasional sales of ivory resumed in 1997 after an eight-year ban.

But four other countries on the continent—South Africa, Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe—are seeking to loosen the restrictions on the international sale of ivory, especially to Japan.

China Sets Ambitious Target

China said World Environment Day will be "a turning point" in its battle to clean up its polluted air with signs of improvement finally showing in the first quarter of this year.

China has set a goal of cutting major air pollutants by 10 percent over a five-year period ending 2010 but failed to meet initial targets last year.

However, State Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) deputy director Zhang Lijun told a news conference that the 10 percent target cut would be achieved due to stricter

enforcement and sulphur filter facilities installed in the last quarter of 2005, reported Bernama.com.

"I am confident this year, total pollutants will see a turning point, it will be reduced but I cannot say to what level it will reduce," Zhang said in releasing China's 2006 environment report to coincide with World Environment Day.

He said the rate of emissions, including sulphur dioxide, had slowed last year compared to 2005 but amounts of nitrate and ammonia were on the rise due to inefficient control, sub-standard benchmarks



A woman covering her mouth as she crosses a busy street in a busy shopping district area of Hong Kong, Feb 28, 2007.

and overuse of fertilisers in agriculture.

Zhang said air quality in over 550 cities was for the better.

SEPA's top priority will be to ensure the safety of

drinking water as concerns mount over pollution of rivers and lakes.

Zhang described the overall situation as stable with water pollution at moderate levels, saying "it has not improved much but it has not worsened much".

In the latest incident, algae spurred by warmer climate and excessive nitrate and phosphate discharge by factories clogged Taihu Lake, forcing two million people in Wuxi in the eastern Jiangsu province to turn off taps and purchase bottled water to drink and wash their clothes.

The report said China had invested 240 billion Yuan (RM107 million) or 1.15 percent of its Gross Domestic Product on environment control last year, with the number of accidents doubling to 161.

Bhutan Mining Harms India

As an explosion booms across the mountains, Yeshey Drukpa, 60, clenches his fist in anger standing in the foothills.

"The abode of the gods is being destroyed," he says, pointing towards billowing

smoke above.

Mineral mining in Bhutan, a country that prides itself on its environmentally friendly policies, is not only angering some locals. It is also damaging agriculture and killing wildlife in neighboring

India, Indian officials said, reported Reuters.

The Pugli hills around Gomtu, an industrial town in southwest Bhutan, are being blasted to extract dolomite, a mineral used both in steel manufacturing and in horticulture.

Just across the Indian border are the famed tea plantations of West Bengal state, the home of Darjeeling tea.

Landslides and erosion caused by mining have left at least 14 estates prone to flooding, the Indian Tea Association says.

Dolomite sediments are also turning the plantations' soil alkaline, while tea

bushes thrive best in slightly acidic soil. In the Makrapara tea estate, airborne dust kicked up from the mines cakes on the leaves, choking the plants.

Production has dropped from 1,800 kg per year to 400 in the last five years, said manager Jaishankar Singh.

Meanwhile in neighboring Jaladpara sanctuary, animals are dying of thirst, unable to drink the river water left red and cloudy by mining deposits, a forestry official said.

A quarter of Bhutan is set aside as national parks or wildlife sanctuaries. Nearly three-quarters is still forest-

ed. But near Gomtu, the once-forested mountains have been left blasted and barren as mining has intensified in recent years.

People living nearby complain that inhaled dolomite dust is giving them respiratory problems. They even claim the destruction of forests and hills has affected the area's microclimate.

India's environment ministry complains that Bhutan is not enforcing scientific mining norms. It wants forest cover to be replanted where possible and barriers constructed to stop landslides affecting West Bengal.

Antalya Students Clean Seashore

In honor of World Environment Day, students from Antalya have worked to clean the seashore at Konyaalti. Including 500 students from Bedriye Bileydi Primary School, 700 students from 12 schools par-

ticipated in the cleaning efforts as part of the June 5th World Environment Day activities organized by the Konyaalti Municipality and Municipal Education Directorate, said Today's zaman.com. After marching along the

beach with slogans advocating protection of the environment, the students removed all of the garbage from the shore. Local and foreign tourists on the beach have followed closely the cleaning done by the students. Saying that it is

sometimes impossible to swim in the sea because of pollution, Gamze Akar called for increased awareness of the environment. Konyaalti mayor, Muhittin Bocek, who participated along with the students, remarked that

this was 11th seashore cleaning campaign. Noting that the shore is being polluted by holiday visitors leaving food remains, coal and other plastic garbage, Mayor Bocek added, "Our students are giving a message to their elders.