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Climate scientists apologise for error-strewn report

Thursday, January 21, 2010 - 08:36 AM

A Nobel Prize-winning panel of climate scientists who wrote the world's most authoritative report on global warming have apologised after five glaring errors were discovered in one paragraph.

The errors are in a 2007 report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a United Nations-affiliated body.

All the mistakes appear in a sub-section that suggests glaciers in the Himalayas could melt away by the year 2035 - hundreds of years earlier than the data actually indicates. The year 2350 was apparently transposed as 2035.

The climate panel and even the scientist who publicised the errors said they were not significant in comparison to the entire report, nor were they intentional.

They do not negate the fact that worldwide, glaciers are melting faster than ever, but the mistakes have opened the door for more attacks from climate change sceptics.

"The credibility of the IPCC depends on the thoroughness with which its procedures are adhered to," Yvo de Boer, head of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, said.

"The procedures have been violated in this case. That must not be allowed to happen again because the credibility of climate change policy can only be based on credible science."

The incident follows a row late last year over the release of stolen emails in which climate scientists talked about suppressing data and freezing out global warming sceptics.

The intense cold spell has some people questioning whether global warming exists.

In a statement, the climate change panel expressed regret over what it called "poorly substantiated estimates" about the Himalayan glaciers.

"The IPCC has established a reputation as a real gold standard in assessment; this is an unfortunate black mark," said Chris Field, a Stanford University professor who in 2008 took over as head of this part of the IPCC research.

"None of the experts picked up on the fact that these were poorly substantiated numbers. From my perspective, that's an area where we have an opportunity to do much better."

Patrick Michaels, a global warming sceptic and scholar at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think-tank, called on the head of the IPCC, Rajendra Pachauri, to resign, adding: "I'd like to know how such an absurd statement made it through the review process. It is obviously wrong."

But a number of scientists, including some critics of the IPCC, said the mistakes

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
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did not invalidate the main conclusion that global warming was without a doubt man-made and a threat.

The mistakes were found by some of the scientists themselves, including one who is an IPCC co-author.

The report in question is the second of four issued by the IPCC in 2007 on global warming with chapters on each continent.

The errors were in a half-page section of the Asia chapter.

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