

## **India and China co-operate over Himalayan glaciers**

*James Lamont*

*India and China are to co-operate in monitoring the melting of glaciers in the Himalayas, a border region crucial to both countries' water supplies and one over which they have gone to war.*

"We are talking to the Chinese about monitoring the Himalayan glaciers," Mr Ramesh said. However, he warned, India would not allow Chinese scientists "to climb all over India's glaciers" but wanted a collaborative research programme.

The Himalayan region and the Tibet plateau are strategically sensitive for the two neighbours. In 1962, Beijing and New Delhi went to war over disputed territory—a military humiliation for India that still rankles.

Seven of the world's greatest rivers, including the Ganges and the Yangtze, are fed by the glaciers. They supply water to about 40 per cent of the world's population.

The Indian government has disputed the science behind climate change's role in melting Himalayan glaciers, saying there is no evidence to support what it claims are misleading doomsday predictions by the west about their disappearance within 40 years.

"It's a highly emotive issue but one has to be a little careful before we write the epitaph of the Himalayan glaciers," said Mr Ramesh.

Water supply is likely to become an increasing security priority for both India and China in the years to come as they seek to maintain high economic growth rates and sustain large populations dependent on farming for their livelihoods.

Some of the latest figures from the Zurich-based World Glacier Monitoring Service show an acceleration in the melting of glaciers across the world. Some of the most alarming retreats are taking place in Europe.

Achim Steiner, executive director of the United Nations Environment Programme, has described melting glaciers as a "canary in the climate change coal-mine", warning that billions of people depend on the natural water storage facilities for drinking water, power generation and agriculture.

The Indian government has requested that the Indian Space Research Organisation and the department of science and technology undertake extensive glacial surveys across the eastern and western Himalayas to assess their condition.

"Historically, India has contributed little to the creation of the climate change problem. Conversely, India has a lot to lose from the effects of climate change," said Vinuta Gopal, a climate and energy campaigner for Greenpeace, the environmental lobby group.

Mr Ramesh is visiting China this month to strike a deal with Beijing ahead of the Copenhagen talks on climate change in December. He said India and China could be a "countervailing power" in resisting legally binding caps on greenhouse emissions that threaten to slow the progress of the world's fastest growing big economies.

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