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Meghalaya: A Paradise Lost

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Shillong, the Pine City of India, is one of the favoured destinations of the Northeasterners, especially those from Assam when the scorching summer sun gets unbearable. It may be a day's stay or a retreat for a week, the fresh air of Shillong always has a refreshing effect on an exhausted soul. However, over the years this paradise for the weary souls has become muggier, thereby giving a hard time to the visitors. **Nilanjan Goswami** reports.

A Personal Account

As a growing up kid, I was always fascinated by the tales about Shillong. The snow-covered roof-tops, the pine trees, the cool misty mornings and the never-ending winter temperature. In fact, when I first visited Shillong, I was amused to see that there were no fans in either any of the homes or shops. The cool temperature of the city won my heart and I wondered why the temperature can't

be this cool in Guwahati as well. But, I never expected that in some 20 years from my first visit to Shillong, the climatic of Shillong will change so drastically. At a time when there were no fans in Shillong, today, the offices and the hotels of the city can't function without an air conditioner.

"I have been a regular to Shillong for over 40 years now and I must say, Shillong today is not the Shillong it used to be in the late 1960s and 70s. Today, I feel like Shillong is more like an oven. It has got hotter and humid," says retired bank manager Sankar Prasad Gogoi, a resident of Guwahati.

SP Gogoi is not alone to bemoan about the lost charm of Shillong, but there are plenty. Sharing the experience about their recent trip to the city, a group of college friends while interacting with *Northeast Today* said, "From traffic to congestion, today Shillong is a hub to everything but not of the coolness of which once it was famous for. We visited Shillong in February earlier this year and trust us, it was a horrible experience. It was warm and there was an inexplicable uneasiness, somewhat choking."

Rising Temperature Menace

At this juncture, a question that surfaces- why do sweat in Shillong? According to a study by researchers from the Water and Climate Lab at Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Gandhinagar, shows that air temperature in Meghalaya is rising at the rate of 0.031 degrees per year. The trend is consistent from 1981 to 2014, barring the years 1991 and 1992. This translates into 1-degree centigrade rise between 1981 and 2014, which is quite significant. Future projections indicate a similar rise over the next two decades.

Based on historical and observed data as well as computer models, the study has projected changes over short-term (2013-2040), mid-term (2041-2070) and long-term (2071-2100) for the state. It is a high-resolution study in the sense that projections have been made for grids of 5 X5 km size, so as to help in vulnerability assessment for each grid and adaptation planning at local level.

Future projections show an increasing temperature rise under different scenarios. Under these projections, the rise in maximum temperature in Meghalaya in the long-term ranges from 2.65 degrees to 3.8 degrees, while the rise in minimum temperature will be between 2 degrees and 3.5 degrees in the long term. The increase in temperature may result in a higher number of extremely hot days and nights. Under the extreme scenario projection, the number of hot days could be as high as 100 a year. Similarly, there may be a decrease in extremely cold days and nights. The higher numbers of hot days and nights and lesser numbers of cold days and cold nights indicate a consistently warming region.

It may be mentioned here that Meghalaya has already seen a rise in temperature of 1 to 1.5 degree in the past three decades, and the projections point to a similar rise in 2040. If the temperature in Meghalaya will rise by about 3 degrees in a span of half a century, then one can say that the future of the state is in complete darkness.

Conclusion

Meghalaya's changing climate will have widespread implications for forests, water resources, biodiversity, agriculture, livestock and human health. Due to a significant rise in temperature, forest fires may go up while extreme rainfall events will increase the risk of landslides in high altitude areas causing siltation of water bodies downstream. The rise in temperature will also threaten endemic plant species many of which are already on the verge of extinction. Rain-fed agriculture in the state will be adversely hit with crop yields and production declining. Higher temperature will also induce premature breaking of insects and pests.