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Ignorance is Bliss: Indian govt. blind to climate science

No mechanism within Environment Ministry and PMO for climate science to inform policy decisions

A series of RTI applications filed with the Environment Ministry and the Prime Minister's office can put the government into a tight spot in the parliament and at international negotiations on climate change. Filed before the Copenhagen climate summit, they reveal that the government was playing blind at Copenhagen. They show that Jairam Ramesh and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh are not updated on international developments on climate change as one would expect from government representatives participating in international negotiations.

There is no mechanism within the Ministry of Environment & Forests (MoEF), Ministry of Earth Sciences, Department of Science and Technology to offer advisories or science briefs to the PMO on the latest developments internationally in climate science. MoEF itself does not receive any such inputs from other ministries

The Ministry stated in its replies that all scientific literature is noted but when provided with a list of notable scientific papers, analyses and climate events and asked to cite the number of references to them in Ministry documents, they failed to produce a single record. Instead, the ministry repeatedly referred to the 2007 IPCC report as the most credible scientific information on climate science.

The group that filed these RTI applications, however says that's no longer true. Manu Sharma, founder of Climate Revolution Initiative says, "IPCC AR4 was certainly credible in early 2007 but all accumulating scientific evidence since then shows it has been understating its case." Although the IPCC has been recently criticised in the media for overstating some of the impacts in its report, Sharma argues that the opposite is true.

He cites more recent scientific analyses such as the UNEP's Climate Change Compendium released in September last year and Copenhagen Diagnosis published in November. Both paint an alarming picture on climate trends. The latter, for example, states that extent of sea-level rise expected by end century will be more than 2.5 times the IPCC projection for continued emissions scenario.

Manu Sharma said, "Environment Minister need to realise that climate change is a moving target and its moving towards us, getting bigger every time a new scientific study is published. It seems, the more we know about climate processes the worse the predictions turn out."

But the government isn't paying attention. The replies reveal widespread ignorance on accountability of this issue within the environment ministry and PMO. Both the institutions tried to pass the buck to other ministries but those ministries were already in the process of filing their own RTI replies stating they too did not have a process in place to monitor science so it can inform policy.

"The government's bluff has been called off", said Manu Sharma. "In the run up to the Copenhagen conference, the Minister of Environment undertook a massive PR exercise, he says, keen to impress the developed world that India is acting on climate change" But RTI applications filed by this group, reveal a totally opposite picture.

This is only the first of several disclosures the group (www.climaterevolution.net) plans to make, that it says, will shock the Indian public and put the government in a tough spot internationally

About Climate Revolution

Climate Revolution is a series of ambitious proposals and initiatives that can potentially transform the social and political climate on climate change in India and be replicated in any part of the world. The group argues, among other things, that the climate crisis cannot possibly be addressed through UNFCCC platform and that the public must be educated and mobilised to force the governments to change. Climate Revolution Initiative is headed by Manu Sharma, an activist and renewable energy expert. Details about RTI Initiative, including scanned replies from various govt. authorities, are available on www.climaterevolution.net/rti