

Glaciers in Tibetan Plateau shrinking rapidly: Report

Beijing: Glaciers in the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, home to several Himalayan rivers, have shrunk by 15% in the past three decades and the situation could worsen in future due to global warming, Chinese scientists say.

The Qinghai-Tibet plateau in western China has seen its glaciers shrink by thousands of square kilometres (from 53,000 to 45,000 sq km), according to a report by the Institute of Tibetan Plateau Research of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS). As the highest place in the world's mid-latitude regions, the plateau is more likely to get affected by global warming, they said. Tibet is the home of several Himalayan rivers including the Brahmaputra.

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“Glaciers in the plateau have been shrinking since the 20th century and sped up since the 1990s,” said Kang Shichang, a state laboratory director with a CAS institute. He added that “more and bigger cracks” have appeared in ice on Mount Everest, a sign of “rapidly melting glaciers”.

China has more than 46,000 glaciers, mainly in the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. The plateau covers the area China calls the Tibetan Autonomous Region as well as highland parts of neighbouring provinces.

They are a reliable indicator of climate change, and easy for scientists to observe, state-run Xinhua news agency reported. Kang said retreating glaciers have impacted meltwater rivers and led to more glacier-lake outbursts.

“It can increase water flow of major rivers in the short term, but in the long run, a continuation of the retreat will eventually deplete the glacial ice and substantially reduce or eliminate runoff,” Shichang said. AGENCIES