

Global warming threatens Tibetan rail link

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An official from China's National Climate Center warned warmer winter and summers in a fragile environmental region will ruin a rail link to Tibet by 2050.

Luo Yong, deputy director of the center said Tuesday temperatures may climb as much as 6 degrees Fahrenheit in the Sanjiangyuan region of the Qinghai-Tibet plateau.

According to Thursday's China Daily, the unique sensitivity to temperature changes in the Sanjiangyuan region is seen by many climatologists as a tripwire for global climate change that includes warming trends for China and East Asia.

Such warming, Luo said, could cause permafrost to melt and threaten the railway within 45 years. The rail link to Tibet is expected to start trial operations in 2006. Since the early 1960s, when the Qinghai-Tibet Highway was formed, permafrost on both sides of the roadbed has retreated as much as 5.6 miles and the area of frozen soil decreased about 13 percent.

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