Thank Global Warming for Freezing You!



A person walks past a snow-covered bus shelter in Chicago.
PHOTO: REUTERS

The record-breaking chill across the US has restarted the old debate about whether global warming is real

AMITAVA KAR

Rezaul Karim is worried as he stares at the lock of his restaurant's front door. It has been closed since Christmas. He is one of the millions of Americans whose lives have come to a virtual halt due to a major winter storm now sweeping into the eastern US. Temperature last week dipped to minus 28 in Bartlesville, a small town close to Oklahoma's northern border with Kansas, that Karim, a Bangladeshi American, has called home for the last ten years. "Yesterday I tried to drive to work but my 2010 Chrysler mini van did not have enough power to make it out of a ditch in the icy road," Karim says over phone. "I walked back home leaving the van on the road-no one would bother to send a tow truck in this mess." He is worried-unpaid bills are piling up on his desk.

It's so cold, even polar bears and penguins are being kept indoors at the Lincoln Park Zoo in Chicago. The animals have never grown the thick layer of fat that bears in their native Arctic develop to insulate themselves against winter temperatures that can range as low as -50 degrees F. So when temperatures plunged well into the negative range in Chicago, they stayed in their 40ish-degree habitat.

"A state of emergency has been declared in the state of New York", says Mohammad Daud in an email. "Road closures and a health advisory were issued by the state of New York in preparation for the bad weather." Daud, another Bangladeshi American, owns a real estate agency that has not sold a single home since December last year. The school his two daughters go to is closed.

States such as Minnesota, though well acquainted with harsh winter seasons, saw wind chill reach 56 degrees below zero in Duluth, while residents of Indiana and Kentucky were warned not to leave their homes as temperatures dropped into the single digits, and wind chill in the minus 20s and below.

Customers were advised to try and conserve power as the power grid serving 61 million Americans in the Mid-Atlantic, Midwest and portions of the South prepared to cope with the high demand created by freezing customers looking for warmth. In Indiana 40,000 customers meanwhile waited for utility crews to restore power knocked out by the storm, reported the AP. Montana recorded a historic low of 51 degrees below zero virtually paralyzing the entire state.

It all began with an elliptical-shaped pattern of frigid winds blowing west to east and centered on the North Pole-known as the polar vortex, in geek speak.