

IT'S TIME TO PRESS THE PANIC BUTTON ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Degradation - GHGs, Ozone Depletion and Climate Change

In an evocative photo clicked on the Arctic ice in Greenland (by climate scientist Steffen Olsen of the Centre for Ocean and Ice at the Danish Meteorological Institute), sled dogs are seen wading through ankle-deep water on top of a melting ice sheet. The water that the dogs are seen walking through is melting ice from an ice sheet 1.2 metres thick at the Inglefield Bredning fjord. Scientists have confirmed that such melting events shouldn't have happened until much later in the summer. In another recent piece of news, Arctic permafrost in Canada has begun to thaw about 70 years sooner than predicted. Scientists claim that this is an indication that the climate is now warmer than at any time in the last 5,000 or more years. This means that the climate crisis is accelerating faster than anyone had imagined.

If these two events in the far north of the planet do not bring the world to the edge of panic, we don't know what will.

The permafrost thaw is a particularly scary event because it could release large amounts of heat-trapping gases, which could spur even higher temperatures, leading to more thawing. This sort of a feedback loop could be catastrophic for the earth. Increased temperatures, sea-level rise, unpredictable and disastrous weather events are all fallouts of an unmitigated climate crisis. Sea-level rise will not only exacerbate the current refugee crisis, causing more and more people to seek refuge inland as shorelines and island countries get washed away, it will make it harder to gain access to resources for everyone. Rising temperatures have already caused changes in disease patterns and animal habitats. Tropical diseases have travelled further because mosquitoes and other vectors can now survive in higher latitudes; several species are at the brink of extinction, and several others have already become extinct.

As has been said over and over again in scientific journals and other studies, the time to act is now, and the situation is quickly getting out of hand. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) meeting that is underway in Bonn, Germany, has set itself the goal to "set the stage for raising ambition to curb greenhouse gas emissions, accelerate resilience-building efforts, and ensure that climate policy is built on a solid foundation of the best available science and knowledge". But it is hard to see how any of that can happen without a concerted political will from countries of the world. That climate change is happening has been known now for many years. That governments and large businesses are not really interested in doing much to minimise damage by really changing the way we do things has also become pretty obvious. Here's hoping that the timing of these events from the Arctic might be able to spur world leaders into action.

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