

GET USED TO A THOUSAND MINI CLIMATE CUTS

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

The northern part of India is experiencing an unusually long winter this year. On Sunday, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said two more western disturbances (WDs), the 16th and 17th of this season, may bring rainfall and chilly winds to the northern plains and snowfall in western Himalayas on March 6 and 11. Delhi experienced its second coldest March day in 27 years on March 2, almost breaching yet another decades-old record after March 1 saw the coldest overall March temperature since 1979. In 2018, Delhi had witnessed the third coldest December in 50 years. The IMD said the frequency of WDs this season was high because of the weakening of the polar vortex and it is more intense this time because of the higher temperature gradient, which is a result of the weakening of the polar vortex. The WD system develops due to a temperature difference between northern and southern latitudes.

The number and intensity of the weather phenomena have surprised scientists, and many believe that such freak weather is the new normal in an age of climate change. In a report released on January 21, the IMD said that such freak weather is going to rise in the coming two decades and there will be a cataclysmic fallout by 2040 if emissions are not contained. The report linked this trend to climate change because India's warming trends are very similar to the pattern of global warming. These findings are also in sync with last year's critical Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) "Global Warming of 1.5 degrees" report, whose co-author, Joyashree Roy, told Hindustan Times: "India may face serious consequences including severe heat stress in big cities, high air pollution levels, salt-water intrusion in coastal areas triggered by rise in sea levels, and increased vulnerability to disasters in high mountain ecosystems."

While the threat of a "cataclysmic fallout" looms large, expect a thousand more mini climate cuts along the way. The policy prescription to avoid such recurring damages has been clear for a long time: lower emission, a push for sustainability in whatever we do and climate-proof cities and agriculture. Every time a freak weather phenomenon hits us, we need to go through this policy prescription and ask ourselves: Are we doing enough to save ourselves from the effects of climate change? For the moment, however, the answer will be a resounding no.

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