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PARIS: Earth had its second-warmest March on record, with Antarctic sea ice shrinking to its second-lowest extent, the European Union's climate monitoring agency said on Thursday.

"The month was jointly the second-warmest March globally," tied with 2017, 2019 and 2020, the Copernicus Climate Change Service said in a report. The hottest March on record was in 2016.

The report is based on computer-generated analyses using billions of measurements from satellites, ships, aircraft and weather stations around the world.

It said temperatures were above average over southern and central Europe and below average over most of northern Europe.

They were far warmer than average over much of North Africa, southwestern Russia, Asia, northeastern North America, South America including drought-stricken Argentina, Australia, and coastal Antarctica.

Conversely, it was much colder than average over western and central North America.

Global warming is causing sea ice to decline and sea levels to rise, raising warnings that dangerous tipping points could be reached.

Copernicus said Antarctic sea ice extent was the second lowest for March in the 45-year satellite data record, at 28 percent below average.

It reached 3.2 million square kilometers on average, 1.2 million sq km below the 1991–2020 average for the month.

It had reached the smallest area on record in February for the second year in a row, continuing a decadelong decline.

In the north, meanwhile, Arctic sea ice extent was 4 percent below average and joint fourth-lowest for March on record, though concentrations were above average in the Greenland Sea.

As temperatures rise globally because of human-caused climate change, Copernicus data show the past eight years were the eight warmest on record.

A United Nations report warned in March that those record-breaking temperatures would figure among the coolest within three or four decades as global temperatures climb, even if planet-warming emissions drop quickly.