

Headline: The march of the polar bears

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The first drop landed like a thud and slid down the dusty car windows in a desultory trail. Just as quickly, a second thud followed it. After that came another one, and then another one... On and on it went until it sounded like a man drumming his fingers on the tabletop. The drizzle had its brief moment of flirtatious thumping upon car windows and pavements before thunderous rain silenced the humming car engine, the children, and the pumping of the city.

This can't be, you thought. It was sunny mere minutes ago.

The weather can't make up its mind. Your body can't, either. In the tug-of-war between sunny and rainy in the early days of January, your nose is leaking and your throat is creaking dry. It wasn't always like this, your grandparents say. It must be climate change.

Growing up at the turn of the new millennium also meant growing up to the realization that you are inhabiting a world far different from the one your parents knew. Perhaps you've experienced it. Whenever you pass bodies of water in the color of your morning iced coffee, your elders heave a sigh and reminisce about how the water used to be so pristine that you could drink it. Or you hear stories of how Manila used to be so cold that there was fog in the morning. You talk about pollution in school, make posters of it. You have never known a world that was sustainable. As far as you were concerned, the ozone layer always had a hole.

It is not unusual to hear about division on many issues. From the most critical of discourses in our town halls to the most trivial celebrity issues on TV, it isn't strange to encounter two sides of the coin. Surprisingly, the division exists between those who believe that climate change is real and those who think it is pure myth or silly propaganda. You must think it strange, especially when you just saw a photo of a thin and lifeless polar bear on Twitter the other day.

This is reality, unfortunately. Just recently, the White House web page on climate change vanished. A number of critics of the newly inaugurated President Donald Trump claim that he does not believe that climate change is real, based on his 2012 Tweet stating that climate change is a hoax. Those who warn of the dire effects of climate change are just as worried about what the new US administration will do to counter the threats of global warming.

Last year's Brexit is also indicative of divisive policies, as Prime Minister Theresa May appears not as keen on climate change as previous Cabinets in the British government were. It was reported that she abolished the department for energy and climate change and replaced it with a department for business, energy, and industrial strategy. Its depth and focus on climate change is debatable.

In the Philippines, the Duterte administration has said it would ratify the Paris climate agreement. Our contribution to taking action vis a vis climate change on a global platform is also a deep concern for us, as our country is seen as one of the most vulnerable to climate change. Philippine coastal communities are in danger of rising sea levels, and livelihoods depend on our rich natural resources. But as a developing country, we look up to First World nations that are the major emitters of greenhouse gases.

Temperature records last year were at an all-time high. The decline in sea ice, if unstopped, will kill off 80 percent of the population of polar bears. Already, they are marching unnaturally in search of food as they are slowly losing their habitats. To them, climate change is not a hoax, or silly propaganda.

But clearly, it is not just about dying polar bears. It is also about losing livelihood, changing the way we live, and altering history. It is strange to think how something that affects all of humanity so massively can be a political, or even religious, issue. While we humans continue to debate about it, the world around us keeps changing. The ice is melting, sea levels are rising, and polar bears are marching. That is, if there would be any marching left to do at all.

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