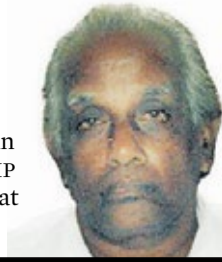


1989

The pleasure boat **Marchioness** sinks on the River Thames following a collision. Fifty-one people are killed.

2006

**Sri Lankan Civil War:** Sri Lankan Tamil politician and former MP **S. Sivamaharajah** is shot dead at his home in Tellippalai.



2007

**China Airlines Flight 120** caught fire and exploded after landing at Naha Airport in Okinawa, Japan.

2008

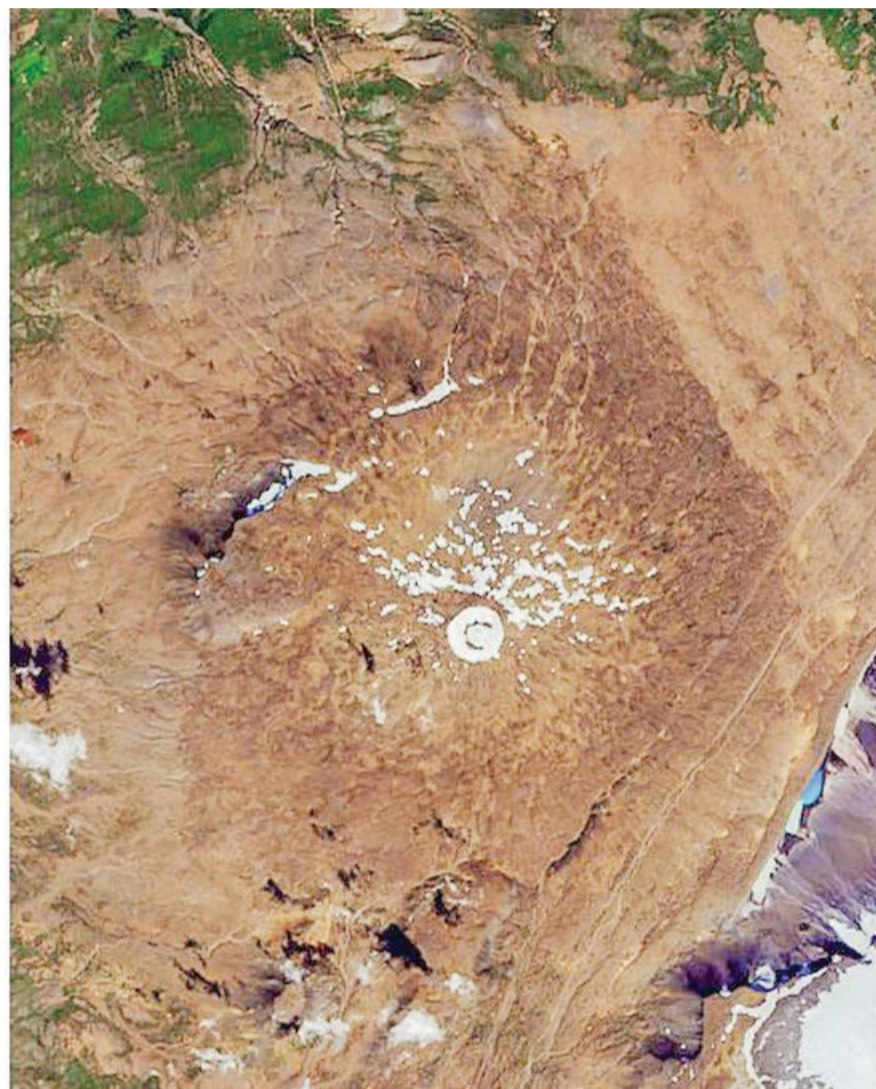
**Spanair Flight 5022**, from Madrid, Spain to Gran Canaria, skids off the runway and crashes at Barajas Airport. Of the 172 people on board, 146 die immediately, and eight more later die of injuries sustained in the crash.

# Climate anxiety will have a disastrous effect on teenagers

*Recent studies showing populations stress about the impact of global warming should be a warning to us all*



Shrinking of the Okjokull glacier in Iceland.



JUSTIN THOMAS

Whenever awoken by a thunderstorm as a child, I would become paralysed by dread. This was during the height of the Cold War and my mind would fill with thoughts of nuclear strikes and radiation.

I wasn't alone in experiencing the nuclear night terrors. In 1977 the American Psychiatric Association set up a taskforce to look specifically at the psychosocial impacts of nuclear developments on young minds.

Today, however, the spotlight shines on a new threat. The global climate emergency has replaced the threat of nuclear annihilation as the spectre of our age.

Last week, the first ever national survey of the mental health impact of climate change reported that the residents of Greenland are experiencing unprecedented levels of stress and anxiety. Although not yet recognised as a diagnosable illness, a 2017 report by the American Psychological Association, called *Mental Health and Our Changing Climate*, used the term *ecoanxiety* to describe "a chronic fear of environmental doom". This was precisely the type of anxiety reported by many of the Greenlanders in the

recent survey.

The Greenland study involved about 2 per cent of the nation's population. More than one third – a total of 38 per cent – reported feeling fearful about the changes resulting from global warming. Greenland, with its proximity to the Arctic Circle, can be considered the front line of the climate emergency. But these concerns are shared far and wide.

The World Health Organisation predicts 250,000 deaths per year between 2030 and 2050 due to the "well-understood impacts of climate change". Unfortunately, many impacts of climate change are not well understood and this is particularly true of the psychosocial consequences. For example, how does it feel to lose a glacier – to watch a vast expanse of the geological landscape disintegrate to nothing?

Up until recently, most Icelanders had no idea how it would feel to witness the final demise of a glacier. Earlier this year, however, Icelandic author Andri Magnason was asked to write the text for a plaque commemorating the first Icelandic glacier to be officially declared dead. The eulogy dedicated to the glacier named Okjokull, or Ok for short, read as follows: "Ok is the first Icelandic glacier

**The World Health Organisation predicts 250,000 deaths per year between 2030 and 2050 due to the "well-understood impacts of climate change".**

to lose its status as a glacier. In the next 200 years, all our glaciers are expected to follow the same path. This monument is to acknowledge that we know what is happening and what needs to be done. Only you know if we did it."

Along with dying glaciers, we are also witnessing an unprecedented rate of habitat loss and species extinction. The Australian philosopher Glenn Albrecht coined the term *solastalgia* to describe the mental anguish we experience when we sense our natural environment is being desecrated or otherwise damaged.

In addition to a sense of grief, changes to the environment can also challenge a person's

sense of place and identity at a fundamental level. How would the people of Al Ain feel if the spring waters dried up or how might the people of Abu Dhabi feel if one half of its name – the dhabi, or gazelle – ever became extinct?

Like *ecoanxiety*, *solastalgia* is not yet recognised as a psychiatric disorder and perhaps that is for the best. To me, *ecoanxiety* and *solastalgia* sound like natural responses to ecological loss or the threat of it. There is, however, evidence that climate change is implicated in more severe and debilitating mental health issues.

In a review of the research to date, an article published last year in the *International Journal of Mental Health Systems* suggested links between extreme weather events and a host of psychological issues, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, substance abuse and suicidal ideation.

One of the big unanswered questions about the impact of the climate crisis, however, concerns its influence on the psychological development of young children. How will the personalities of children growing up in the shadow of such environmental uncertainty be affected?

A similar question was asked

by the American Psychiatric Association's task force, the one exploring the nuclear threat back in 1977. That particular team concluded that the fear of a nuclear holocaust was detrimental to personality development. Some adolescents, they claimed, were likely to become disillusioned and unwilling to delay gratification or make plans for the future. The researchers predicted that more young people would indulge in drug use and other escapist activities as a result. Could we be facing a similar predicament as a result of the climate crisis?

At present, though, many young people are responding to the climate emergency with lifestyle changes and vigorous demands for decisive remedial action. For example, consider the activism and inspiring work of Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg. The 16-year-old is presently making a zero-carbon transatlantic trip by yacht to attend the UN Climate Action Summit in New York next month.

Whether or not such activities can reverse current climate trends is debatable. But from a psychological perspective, perceiving oneself as being part of an attempted solution is far healthier than resignation, denial or escapism.



TOP  
4  
TWEETS

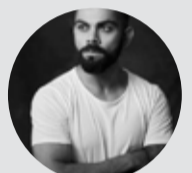
01



Reports of suffering are upsetting, but it's a mistake to think we can do nothing about it. Many problems we face are of our own making. Since we are social animals who need friends, the least we can do is smile and respond to others warm-heartedly—that will make a difference.

@DalaiLama

02



From starting as a teenager on the same day in 2008 to reflecting on the journey 11 years after, I couldn't have dreamt of the blessings God has showered me with. May you all get the strength and power to follow your dreams and always follow the right path. #forevergrateful

@imVkohli

03



"To live is to choose. But to choose well, you must know who you are and what you stand for, where you want to go and why you want to get there." – #KofiAnnan often said this to me, & to the world. Today, a year after his passing, I remember my mentor, boss & friend.

@ShashiTharoor

04



Democrats want Open Borders and Crime! So dangerous for our Country. But we are building a big, beautiful, NEW Wall! I will protect America, the Dems don't know where to start!

@realDonaldTrump

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