

Here comes the sun ...

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Printed and bound by

Business Print • 012 843 7600

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Published on behalf of

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If 2023 served as an indication of what we can expect in terms of weather patterns, then South Africans are in for a rough ride in 2024 and beyond. These past few years have been characterised by record maximum temperatures and to make it even worse, we currently find ourselves amid an El Niño cycle that is set to continue and make 2024 our hottest year yet. Our producers are bracing themselves for a really tough time.

Change is a given

The thing about climate change is that we can't really do much about it. Yes, there are many manmade situations that have exacerbated the situation, but throughout history there has been climate change that altered the face of Earth.

These changes are mostly divided into cold periods or ice ages (glacials) and warm periods (interglacials). For the last one million years, these changes have mostly taken place in roughly 100 000-year cycles, with the last of the ice age glaciations having peaked around 20 000 years ago. Experts tell us that over the course of these cycles, global average temperatures warmed or cooled anywhere from 3°C to perhaps as much as 8°C.

We also know that these drastic changes wiped out some species and gave life to new or adapted ones. Perhaps this is what scares humankind the most, but we must always remember that these changes took place over hundreds of thousands of years. Change is a given, but it doesn't happen overnight.

Perhaps these last few years with its numerous fires, floods, heatwaves and cold spells also made it seem as though the elements were suddenly changing. However, it has been increasing gradually and perhaps we have just been slumbering a bit and did not notice it until it really and truly affected us directly.

The fact is, climate change is in our faces and no matter how much we plan and mitigate, it is bound to happen and will affect us in some or other way. A lot of research is being done regarding the adaptability of crops and animals to changing climates. However, none of this will come to fruition if humankind does not also adapt and this seems to be the greatest challenge of all – getting humans to adapt. Animals and plants, without human interference, have a natural way of adapting and changing as they have no choice but to follow instinct. Humans, however, seem to have lost that instinct to survive and adapt.

Adaptability of humans

I read the other day that studies show humans are losing their cognitive ability at a rapid pace, especially when it comes to logic, vocabulary, visual and mathematical problem solving. Most of this is because of our reliance on cellphones, runaway social media statements, and automated functions such as artificial intelligence (ChatGPT) and autocomplete. In short, we are losing our ability to take decisions, accept change and adapt naturally.

Take your own decisions

My wish for 2024 is very simple – let's start using the brains we were blessed with by taking decisions without consulting social media and AI-generated solutions. Follow your gut (the gut has been shown to be linked to the brain). Technology might be smart, but it is dumbing us down. Life has a simple rule – only the fittest (and smartest) will survive.

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Mondstuk van die Suid-Afrikaanse aartappelbedryf • Mouthpiece of the South African potato industry

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VOL 38 NO 1 • JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2024

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