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Aug. 11, 2004. 01:00 AM

Evidence shows ice in Arctic thinning

Thickness dropped 1 metre over 30 years U.S. gathered data

during sub missions

PETER CALAMAI
SCIENCE WRITER

OTTAWA—New scientific evidence indicates that Prime Minister Paul Martin could be on thin ice during his four-day tour of the North that gets under way today.

Sonar recordings by American submarines suggest that the summer ice across the central Arctic Ocean was more than a metre thinner on average in the 1990s than three and four decades earlier.

The measurements were taken during four secret U.S. Navy submarine cruises dating back to 1958 that criss-crossed areas of the Arctic which both Canada and the then-Soviet Union claim as their territory. These were compared with readings made by three American submarine excursions in the 1990s as part of a research program.

The U.S. researchers who analyzed the measurements say climate warming was largely responsible for melting the ice in the Canada Basin portion of the Arctic Ocean. Winds and currents play a bigger role in the European and Russian sectors of the Arctic Ocean by driving thick ice

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southward, they conclude in an article just published online in the *Journal of Geophysical Research*, a leading publication.

The thinning in the Canadian portion of the Arctic was the most extreme, with average summer thickness plunging from 3.1 metres to 1.8 metres over the decades.

Lead U.S. researcher Drew Rothrock wrote that the new analysis rebuts a competing theory that ice was simply piling up along the shores in the Canadian archipelago instead of actually thinning. But sophisticated computer modelling is needed to nail down how much of the overall thinning is caused by climate warming and how much by winds and currents, says Rothrock of the University of Washington's Polar Science Center.

While some scientists aren't convinced that climate change is causing Arctic ice to thin, they generally agree that the ice coverage in the Arctic Ocean has been shrinking drastically. Satellite images show an almost 30 per cent drop between 1979 and 2002 in the Arctic ice expanse at the end of summer, said David Barber, a sea ice expert at the University of Manitoba.

The Prime Minister is expected to raise climate change as he tours Northern communities starting today in Pond Inlet on the northeastern tip of Baffin Island. Other stops on Baffin tomorrow include Pangnirtung and Iqaluit. On Friday Martin is scheduled to visit Inuvik and Tuktoyuktuk.

Additional articles by Peter Calamai

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