**Apocalypse soon?**

BY M A H I R A L I 2021-08-11

IT`S hardly a coincidence that the sixth assessment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) arrives amid copious evidence of the catastrophes propelled by environmental degradation.

A vast Greek tragedy continues to unfold amid a torrid Mediterranean summer that has also brought wildfires to Turkey and Italy. Parts of California, too, remain ablaze.

A shocking heatwave in the Pacific northwest turned parts of Canada, of all places, into a cauldron. But then, Siberia has also suffered similar consequences, and unprecedented temperatures have been recorded more broadly in the Arctic zone.

Life-threatening floods are hardly a novelty in the subcontinent, but they are rather rare in Germany and Belgium. Climate change sceptics could once dismiss extreme weather events as natural phenomena that humanity has coped with for millennia. But lately they have become far more frequent, their intensity super-charged by global warming as scientists are now increasingly able to figure out beyond reasonable doubt.

The admirable goal of restricting that warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius has the aura of a battle that`s been lost. The earth has already warmed by 1.1°C since the late 19th century, and the IPCC assessment suggests that at the present rate of greenhouse gas emissions, the 1.5°C threshold will be crossed within a couple of decades. It may well be much quicker than that though.

Even if by some miracle the increase in global temperature could be restricted to 1.5°C, much of the damage that has already been done would take decades to remedy.

The bigger and now seemingly inevitable dangers lie beyond that level, stretching to the devastating possibility of 4.4°C by the end of the century.

That outcome is depressingly conceivable.

It would be incredible if the COP26 UN conference scheduled for Glasgow in November could somehow stall the inexorable drift towards the worst-case scenario. But we know that even supposedly successful conferences seldom achieve such objectives. There are promises made, but rarely fulfilled.

Paris 2015 still looms as a cautionary tale, and Glasgow 2021 postponed from 2020 may well go down in history as a largely squandered opportunity, notwithstanding the impetus provided by the latest IPCC assessment, which by its very nature implies acceptance of its findings by 195 governments.

Precedence, after all, dictates caution. A majority of those governments represent nations that are likely to bear the brunt of climate change, yet simply cannot afford to switch away from fossil fuels as a means of meeting their energy requirements.

Assistancehasbeenpromised,butnotalwaysdelivered and even when it is, all too of ten it takes the shape of loans (to be repaid by countries already drowning in debt) rather than grants.

More broadly, the devotion to fossil fuels by far the worst of fenders in exacerbating climate change -is also grounded in money.

Coal and oil and gas generate not just huge amounts of carbon dioxide emissions, but also phenomenal profits. In any number of cases, a cut from this gushing cash flow goes into the coffers of the entities running the show.

The latter, in turn, fulfil their obligation by insisting, for example, that solar and wind energy is all very well, but energy f rom fossil fuels will still be required for a long time to come for those periods when the sun doesn`t shine or the breeze doesn`t blow.

The world would be in a very different place, no doubt, had the IPCC`s message been heeded around the time of its first report back in 1990, and sufficient resources had been devoted to solar and wind. but this was considered `uneconomic` back then, and itwas only more recently that the idea of making money from green power gathered any momentum.

It`s running a poor second to fossil fuels, but phenomenal progress in energy storage means we need to worry a lot less about the sun not shining (otherwise known asnight) and the wind not blowing (which these days usually signifies a calm before the storm).

Yet the devotion to fossil fuels stretches across continents, from North America to Asia,Australia and Africa. Chinaisoftenpinpointed as the world`s worst of fender in terms of emissions, which is true, but it also boasts the planet`s biggest array of solar energy panels and the largest wind farms.

China is also one of the few countries to be sanctioning the development of coal-based energy plants, thereby promoting the idea of their longevity.

But the devotion to fossil fuels also af flicts plenty in the West, which makes it harder to imagine Glasgow making too much of a difference. Yet the choice between going on living the way we do and leaving behind a habitableplanetforourchildrenandgrandchildren is pretty stark and a far more equitable world, at every level, remains a condition of global sustainability.

We might stumble on to that path, but`s not where the world is headed so far. m mahir.dawn @gmail.com