

Climate crisis threatens human civilisation – study

Human civilisation as we know it may have already entered its last decades, a worrying new report examining the likely future of our planet's habitability warns. A report in **The Independent** notes that the increasingly disastrous impacts of the climate crisis, coupled with inaction to tackle it are sending our planet down a bleak path towards an increasingly chaotic world which could overwhelm societies around the globe, the report's authors contend. The paper, produced by the Melbourne-based think tank, the Breakthrough National Centre for Climate Restoration, is presented by the former chief of the Australian Defence Forces and retired Royal Australian Navy Admiral Chris Barrie. The paper argues that 'climate change now represents a near to mid-term existential threat to human civilisation,' and **calls for a recalibration in how governments respond to estimated climate scenarios so they take worst case projections more seriously**. The authors said 'the world is currently completely unprepared to envisage, and even less deal with, the consequences of catastrophic climate change,' but also put forward policy recommendations which could help to mitigate the worst effects. 'To reduce this risk and protect human civilisation, a massive global mobilisation of resources is needed in the coming decade to build a zero-emissions industrial system and set in train the restoration of a safe climate. This would be akin in scale to the World War II emergency mobilisation,' they argue.

The concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has increased by the second highest annual rise in the past six decades, according to new data. A report in **The Guardian** notes that atmospheric concentrations of the greenhouse gas were 414.8 parts per million in May, which was 3.5ppm higher than the same time last year, according to readings from the Mauna Loa observatory in Hawaii, where carbon dioxide has been monitored continuously since 1958. **Scientists have warned for more than a decade that concentrations of more than 450ppm risk triggering extreme weather events and temperature rises as high as 2°C, beyond which the effects of global heating are likely to become catastrophic and irreversible.** May is the most significant month for global carbon dioxide concentrations because it is the peak value for the year, before the growth of vegetation in the northern hemisphere starts to absorb the gas from the air. The seasonal peak and fall can be seen in the Keeling curve, named after Charles Keeling, who started the observations on Mauna Loa because of its isolation in the Pacific Ocean. Ralph Keeling of the Scripps Institute, and the son of Charles, said: 'The CO2 growth rate is still very high – the increase from last May was well above the average for the past decade.' He pointed to the mild El Niño conditions experienced this year as a possible factor.

Public concern about the environment has soared to record levels in the UK since the visit of Greta Thunberg to Parliament and the Extinction Rebellion protests in April. A report in **The Guardian** notes that the environment is now cited by people as the third most pressing issue facing the nation in tracking data from the polling company YouGov that began in 2010. Environment was ranked after Brexit and health, but is ahead of the economy, crime and immigration. Young people rate environmental problems such as the climate crisis and global annihilation of wildlife even higher, placing them second behind Brexit. **Almost half of 18- to 24-year-olds chose environmental issues as one of the nation's three most pressing concerns, compared with 27% of the general population.** A similar surge in public anxiety has taken place in Germany, where the Green party performed particularly well in the European Parliament elections last month. Thunberg, the Swedish teenager whose solo school strike for climate action helped create a global movement, told MPs in April that the UK Government's active support for fossil fuels and airport expansion was 'beyond absurd'. Extinction Rebellion activists also mounted a week of high-profile protests, mainly in the capital, in which roads were blocked and more than 1 000 people were arrested. On 1 May, MPs endorsed a Labour motion to declare a formal climate and environment emergency.

A group of young Americans who have spent nearly four years trying to compel the federal government to take action on climate change found themselves back in court this week, arguing that their unprecedented lawsuit should move forward. According to a report in the **Washington Post**, the Trump administration, like the Obama administration before it, was there to argue once again that the lawsuit should have been tossed out before it ever went to trial, both because the plaintiffs did not meet the legal requirements to bring such a suit and because 'there is no fundamental constitutional right to a "stable climate system".' The lawsuit, filed in 2015 by 21 young people who argue that the failure of government leaders to combat climate change violates their constitutional right to a clean environment, had been scheduled to go to trial last autumn before a district judge in Oregon. But it was delayed at the last minute while the Supreme Court considered an emergency request from the government. In early November, the court refused to grant the Trump administration's plea to stop the case before trial, instead

sending it back to the US Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit. The three judges presiding over the hearing grilled both attorneys on the particulars of their arguments, and they seemed to wrestle with whether the courts could make such sweeping demands of the government. **In an interview last autumn, lead attorney Juial Olson was optimistic that the young plaintiffs would get the trial they seek.** 'I believe we will get to trial,' she said. 'We have overcome everything the government has thrown at us. It is not luck. It is the strength of the case and the strength of the evidence and the strength of the legal arguments we are making.'

US billionaire Michael Bloomberg said last week he would spend half a billion dollars in the 'fight of our time' to move the US away from carbon energy and combat climate change. According to a report in **The Herald**, the former New York mayor and philanthropist said the \$500m investment would go towards launching the Beyond Carbon initiative, which aims to close nearly 250 coal plants throughout the country by 2030 and prevent new ones. **'We're in a race against time with climate change, and yet there is virtually no hope of bold federal action on this issue for at least another two years,'** Bloomberg said. Bloomberg added the new campaign meant he had pledged a total of \$1bn towards fighting climate change, including the 2011 Beyond Coal effort, which had so far closed 289 coal plants in the US. On its website, Beyond Carbon said it planned to work toward a 100% clean energy economy and would also campaign against the construction of new gas plants in the US.

Japan's Government issued a new report last week describing the reduction of carbon emissions as 'an urgent issue'. A **News24** report notes that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's Cabinet adopted a renewable energy white paper that restated its goal of reducing the amount of energy derived from fossil fuels – so-called defossilisation. **It also reiterated its aim of increasing energy from renewables to 22-24% of the total by 2030.** Japan's Institute for Sustainable Energy Policies estimates that the country generated 15.6% of its energy from renewables last year. One of the most politically contentious aspects of the Abe Government's energy plans remains its focus on promoting nuclear energy, which has been deeply unpopular with the public since the Fukushima disaster. Currently, nine nuclear reactors are in operation in Japan, all of them in the southwestern part of the country. Japan's opposition parties are calling for the complete abandonment of nuclear power, either immediately or at least by 2030.