ALARM BELLS

2010s hottest decade in history, UN says as emissions rise again

AGENCIES
Madrid, December 3

THIS DECADE IS set to be the hottest in history, the United Nations said Tuesday in an annual assessment outlining the ways in which climate change is outpacing humanity's ability to adapt to it.

The World Meterological Organisation said global temperatures so far this year were 1.1 degrees Celsius (two degrees Farenheit) above the pre-industrial average between 1850-1900. That puts 2019 on course to be in the top three warmest years ever recorded, and possibly the hottest non-El Nino year yet.

Man-made emissions from burning fossil fuels, building infrastructure, growing crops and transporting goods mean 2019 is set to break the record for atmospheric carbon concentrations, locking in further warming, the WMO said.

Oceans, which absorb 90% of the excess heat produced by greenhouse gases, are now at their highest recorded temperatures.

The world's seas are now a quarter more acidic than 150 years ago, threatening vital marine ecosystems upon which billions of people rely for food and jobs.

In October, the global mean sea level reached its highest on record, fuelled by the 329 billion tonnes of ice lost from the Greenland ice sheet in 12 months. Each of the last four decades has been hotter than the last.

And far from climate change being a phenomenon for future generations to confront, the effects of humanity's insatiable, growth-at-any cost consumption means millions are already counting the damage. The report said more than 10 million people were internally displaced in the first half of 2019 — seven million directly due to extreme weather events such as storms, flooding and drought.

By the end of the year, the WMO said new displacements due to weather extremes could reach 22 million.

"Once again in 2019 weather and climate related risks hit hard," said WMO secretary-general Petteri Taalas.

"Heatwaves and floods which used to be 'once in a century' events are becoming more regular occurrences." At just 1C hotter than pre-industrial times, 2019 has already seen deadly heatwaves in Europe, Australia and Japan, superstorms devastate south-east Africa, and wildfires rage out of control in Australia and California.

Climate accord will protect US economy, labour leaders say

TOP CORPORATE executives and labour leaders on Monday issued a public plea for the United States to stay in the global pact to avert catastrophic temperature rises, arguing the battle against climate change would protect the nation's economy and create jobs and businesses.

The group that included the heads of Apple, Tesla, Unilever and Royal Dutch Shell said the Paris Agreement on global warming would boost economic health and build competitive companies, in a statement released as UN climate talks started in Madrid.

President Donald Trump's administration plans to pull the United States — one of the world's biggest emitters of planet-warming greenhouse gases — out of the 2015 accord adopted by nearly 200 nations with the aim of limiting global warming to 'well below' 2 degrees Celsius and ideally to 1.5 degrees.

Trump has argued the Paris deal would cost the United States trillions of dollars, kill millions of jobs and hinder the oil, gas, coal and manufacturing industries. It began the formal process of withdrawing from the pact last month. — PTI

A renewable-energy ride

Climate activist Greta Thunberg (left) arrives in Lisbon on Tuesday. Greta has arrived by catamaran in the port of Lisbon after a three-week voyage across the Atlantic Ocean from the United States. The Swedish teen sailed to the Portuguese capital before heading to neighboring Spain to attend the UN Climate Change Conference taking place in Madrid. —AP

Europe set to overhaul its entire economy in green deal push

BLOOMBERG
Brussels, Dec 3

THE EUROPEAN UNION is gearing up for the world's most ambitious push against climate change with a radical overhaul of its economy.

At a summit in Brussels next week, EU leaders will commit to cutting net greenhouse-gas emissions to zero by 2050, according to a draft of their joint statement for the December 12-13 meeting. To meet this target, the EU will promise more green investment and adjust all of its policy making accordingly. "If our common goal is to be a climate-neutral continent in 2050, we have to act now," Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, told a United Nations climate conference on Monday. "It's a generational transition we have to go through."

The commission, the EU's regulatory arm, will have the job of drafting the rules that would transform the European economy once national leaders have signed off on the climate goals for 2050. The wording of the first draft summit communique, which may still change, reflects an initial set of ideas to be floated by the commission on the eve of the leaders' gathering.

The EU plan, set to be approved as the high-profile United Nations summit in Madrid winds up, would put the bloc ahead of other major emitters. Countries including China, India and Japan have yet to translate voluntary pledges under the 2015 Paris climate accord into binding national measures. US President Donald Trump has said he'll pull the US out of the Paris agreement.

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In a pitch of her Green Deal to member states and the European Parliament on December 11, von der Leyen is set to promise a set of measures to reach the net-zero emissions target, affecting sectors from agriculture to energy production. It will include a thorough analysis on how to toughen the current 40% goal to reduce emissions by 2030 to 50% or even 55%, according to an EU document obtained by Bloomberg News.

In the next step, the commission will propose an EU law in March that would "make the transition to climate neutrality irreversible," von der Leyen told the UN meeting. She said the measure will include "a farm-to-fork strategy and a biodiversity strategy" and will extend the scope of emissions trading.

The EU Emissions Trading System is the world's largest cap-and-trade market for greenhouse gases. It imposes pollution caps on around 12,000 facilities in sectors from refining to cement production, including Royal Dutch Shell Plc and BASF SE. Von der Leyen eyes the inclusion of road transport into the market and cutting the number of free emission permits for airlines.

Some of the transportation industry's biggest polluters have already stepped up efforts to reduce their environmental impact. In June, France's Airbus SE, its US rival Boeing Co. and other aviation companies pledged to reduce net CO_2 emissions by half in 2050 compared with 2005 levels. EasyJet Plc, the UK-based discount airline, has promised to offset all of its carbon emissions by planting trees and supporting solar-energy projects, while Air France will take similar steps on its domestic routes.

Germany's Volkswagen, the world's largest automaker, aims to become CO_2 neutral by 2050, while Daimler AG plans to reach that target for its Mercedes-Benz luxury car lineup by 2039. To ensure that coal-reliant Poland doesn't veto the climate goals next week, EU leaders will pledge an "enabling framework" that will include financial support, according to the document, dated December 2.

China's school kids smartest in the world

BLOOMBERG
Bejing, December 3

CHINESE STUDENTS FAR out-stripped peers in every other country in a survey of reading, math and science ability, underscoring a reserve of future economic strength and the struggle of advanced economies to keep up.

The OECD's triennial study of 15 year-old students across the world found that the four Chinese provinces tested — Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang — out-performed in science and mathematics, even if household income is well below members' average. In reading, the 10% most disadvantaged Chinese students tested had better skills than the OECD average.

"The quality of their schools today will feed into the strength of their economies tomorrow," OECD secretary general Angel Gurria said.

The PISA study of 600,000 students in 79 countries shines a light on the difficultly of improving education, sometimes irrespective of the resources that are dedicated to it. That appears to be particularly problematic for OECD countries that have increased spending on primary and secondary students by more than 15% in the past decade.

"It is disappointing that most OECD countries saw virtually no improvement in the performance of their students since PISA was first conducted in 2000," Gurria said.

Messi wins record 6th Ballon d'Or

JULIEN PRETOT
Paris, December 3

LIONEL MESSI CLAIMED a record sixth Ballon d'Or award on Monday, beating Liverpool's leading nominees and Cristiano Ronaldo to lift soccer's most prestigious individual trophy.

The Argentine, who won the Liga title with Barcelona but only managed third place in the Copa America with his country, added to his 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2015 trophies.

He finished above Dutchman Virgil van Dijk and Portugal's third-placed Ronaldo, who has won the award five times.

"I am very lucky, I am blessed. I hope I will continue for a long time," Messi told reporters. "I realise that I'm lucky even if one day it will be time to retire," added the 32-year-old.

"It will be tough but I still have some years ahead of me. Time flies so I will enjoy football and my family."

Senegal's Sadio Mane, who along with runner-up Van Dijk and fellow Liverpool nominees Alisson Becker of Brazil and Egypt's Mohamed Salah, helped the Merseyside club win the Champions League, came fourth in the poll of international journalists.

"It was amazing," said Van Dijk. "There are a couple of players like him (Messi) who are fantastic. I'm proud of what I've achieved with Liverpool and Holland. It's going to be tough (to win the award) when these guys are around."

Messi, whose stellar career was rewarded with another trophy, and Ronaldo, had between them won 10 consecutive Ballon d'Or awards until Croatia's Luka Modric prevailed in 2018.

Rapinoe wins women's award

Megan Rapinoe earlier won the women's Ballon d'Or after leading the United States to a record-extending fourth World Cup title in France this year as they retained the trophy.

The 34-year-old midfielder, the standout player at the June-July tournament, succeeded Norway's Ada Hegerberg who did not take part in the World Cup.

Rapinoe was not present at the ceremony in the Theatre du Chatelet, where the show 'An American In Paris' is on.

"I'm so sad I can't make it tonight. It's absolutely incredible congrats to the other nominees. I can't believe I'm the one winning in this field, it's been an incredible year," Rapinoe said in a recorded message.

"I want to thank my team mates and the US federation."