55 HOPE AMID CLIMATE CHAOS

Every one of us will love someone who is still alive in 2100, says climate campaigner Ayisha Siddiqa. That loved one will either face a world in climate chaos or a clean, green utopia, depending on what we do today.

 It’s a powerful reason for action, providing hope that the will for transformative change can be found. But are there more tangible reasons for optimism in fighting the climate emergency? The challenge is undoubtedly immense: carbon emissions have yet to start falling and must plummet by half by 2030 to avoid the worst outcomes.

Yet the situation is far from hopeless. From the exponential growth of green solutions to the power of protest, experts say there is a clear path to limiting the damage. The question is how fast we can travel along it.

The shining light of climate hope is the exponential growth of ever-cheaper renewable energy, which now delivers 75% of all new power – coal has plummeted to just 4%. An important recent study found that a swift transition to clean energy would save trillions of dollars, even without accounting for the enormous damage continued fossil use would cause. Even climate deniers should be on board with that, says study author Prof Doyne Farmer at the University of Oxford.

Electric vehicle sales are also rising exponentially. Sales in China doubled year-on-year in August, to more than 500,000. Both of these green technologies have passed tipping points in many places – they are now simply so good and cheap that a runaway takeover is inevitable.

The energy bills crisis in Europe caused by the war in Ukraine has emboldened fossil fuel interests to push for new oil and gas exploitation. But senior figures say the war will ultimately boost climate action, not block it. “The case for a global energy transition is more solid now than before the invasion,” says a UN top climate official. “Once we are on the other side of the current Russian blackmail, no one will want to be [held] hostage again.” Norway’s prime minister says: “The war is pushing significant speed-up of the installation of solar, offshore wind, hydrogen, and the rest of it.”

Yet, geopolitics is also the key to an issue now at the heart of the climate challenge: climate finance. The nations of the global south, which did not cause global heating, want funding for cutting emissions, adapting to inevitable impacts and recovering from damage wrought by supercharged extreme weather. The issue could dominate the next UN climate summit in Egypt in November.

For years, major nations like the US have blocked such funding, fearing unlimited liability. But there is movement, with Denmark this month becoming the first national government to commit loss and damage funds.

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