

Tech solutions to the climate crisis?

If the world can come together to create vaccines in less than one year instead of 10, surely we can do the same to deal with the breakdown of our climate.

THE world can only hope that this is the year. The year to what? The year we start making big progress on tackling climate breakdown – and rest assured, breakdown is what it is. Not change. Change is not a strong enough word.

Last year, we not only struggled with a pandemic but also with out of control wildfires everywhere, from Siberia to Australia and the United States. There were so many hurricanes in 2020, the US National Hurricane Center ran out of names for them.

A dust storm in the Sahara dubbed Godzilla spanned 8,000km and blocked out the sky; it was the biggest storm of its kind. Ever. Ice is melting from glaciers all over, from Greenland to the South and North Poles. The loss of sea ice is reaching a point of irreversibility.

Add to all of this the fact that the last five years have been the hottest ever on record, which was said about the previous five years before that, and it's easy to see why this is actually our climate breaking down.

The good thing about climate breakdown being so in your face is that it's pretty hard to ignore. And the effects we're talking about – ever-worsening wildfires, dust storms that span a continent – are the things of a Gerard Butler end-of-the-world film.

And yet according to a report from the National Resource

Governance Institute, state-owned fossil fuel firms are planning a combined US\$1.9tril (RM7.7tril) push for oil projects. This would completely negate the world's ability to combat climate breakdown. As the report states, "Either the world does what's necessary to limit global warming or national oil companies can profit from these investments. Both are not possible."

It'd be nice to think that as a species we aren't so shortsighted that in face of the end of the world, people are still opposing doing what is necessary because, profit. But the report also states that "A lot of the oil industry wants one last party, and they are going to invest trillions".

One last party. Or we save the world. Let's get our priorities straight.

There are signs we're getting there. (Still new) US President Joe Biden has stated that combating the climate crisis is his administration's top priority and moved promptly to shut down a much debated oil pipeline in his country.

This is good news for the world. Like it or not, America still holds a lot of sway and this is a powerful message that climate breakdown must be dealt with.

Additionally, there has been an uptick in media coverage acknowledging that 2021 must be a turning point year. United Nations secretary-general António Guterres has been quoted saying that this year is a "make or break moment" for the

climate crisis – and to be clear, what could break is our world.

The consensus this year is that COP 26 (the 26th Conference of the Parties to the UN Climate Change Conference), aka the Glasgow Climate Change Conference, originally scheduled for November 2020 before a certain virus cancelled it, now slated for November 2021 finally has to be the conference where we stop

making promises to fix things 10 years from now and make the hard choices to start fixing our world right now.

To be fair, this doesn't mean a drastic change in our economic system. It just means a more environmentally responsible one, an economic system that doesn't cynically value money over the wellbeing of our world.

Former US President Barack Obama offered the sentiment that the world would be crazy to get rid of capitalism but we do need to rein it in.

But is it too late to make the changes we need to make?

According to my professors at university we were too late when I was graduating, and that was back in 2001, and their predictions are coming true much sooner than they were supposed to.

But I don't think that means we're too late, and it's because the pandemic has given me hope.

The Covid-19 pandemic, for all the pain and hardship it has wrought, has also brought something else: A plethora of vaccines in record time. Usually, a vaccine takes 10 to 20 years to develop but these were completed and rolled out in less than a year.

This is the hope, and it's really the only thing that can save us: our technology and our ability to pool resources to find a solution.

It is too late for us to simply stop emitting carbon dioxide and expect things to get better. But we can come up with technology to pull the carbon out of the atmosphere.

Whether it's organic, like more trees, or massive kelp and sea grass beds to store all that carbon, or whether it's a technical solution, or more likely a combination of these efforts, we can fix climate breakdown if we all work together.

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