World on course to burn more coal, threatening climate goals

Coal consumption is set to rise in the coming years as growing demand for electricity in developing countries outpaces a shift to cleaner sources of electricity in industrialised nations. While use of the most polluting fossil fuel had a historic dip in 2019, the International Energy Agency anticipates steady increases in the next five years. That means the world will face a significant challenge in meeting pledges to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming. “There are few signs of change,” the agency wrote in its annual coal report released in Paris yesterday. “Despite all the policy changes and announcements, our forecast is very similar to those we have made over the past few years.” While this year is on track for biggest decline ever for coal power, that’s mostly due to high growth in hydroelectricity and relatively low electricity demand in India and China, said Carlos Fernandez Alvarez, senior energy analyst at the Paris-based IEA. Despite the drop, global coal consumption is likely

to rise over the coming years, driven by demand in India, China and Southeast Asia. Power generation from coal rose almost 2% in 2018 to reach an all-time high, remaining the world's largest source of electricity. The steady outlook for coal comes in spite of waning demand in industrialised nations. Europe has set a goal of zeroing out carbon pollution by the middle of the century, which would mean drastic reductions for coal. In the US, competition from natural gas has cut into demand for coal, despite President Donald Trump's vows to revive the industry. The story is diff erent in Asia, which will more than make up for reductions elsewhere. India, with a population of more than 1.3bn, will see coal generation increase by 4.6% a year through 2024 to help power its growing economy. In Southeast Asia, coal demand will grow more than 5% annually. China, which accounts for almost half the world's consumption, will also have modest growth with usage peaking in 2022. "How we address this issue in Asia is critical for the long-term success of any global eff orts to reduce emissions," Fatih Birol, the IEA's executive director, wrote in a foreword to the report. Any new coal plants added to meet the growing power demand in these countries will likely be in use for decades. Even as China's coal consumption slows and then declines after 2022, emissions from the fuel would need to rapidly decline in order to meet climate targets. Under current policies, the world is set to warm almost 3 degrees Celsius (5.4 degrees Fahrenheit) by the end of the century. That's double the rate scientists say is needed to constrain the worst impacts of climate change. To prevent those increases, it would be necessary to use technology that captures and stores carbon as it's emitted from power plants, the IEA said. While the technology is expensive and untested at scale. But with coal here to stay, it may be the only option to reduce emissions.

GECF highlights challenges posed by climate change at COP25

Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) secretary-general Dr Yury Sentyurin spoke at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP25) that concluded in Madrid recently.

Addressing the participants, the GECF official reaffirmed the crucial importance of challenges posed by climate change, alongside with the shared values and joint efforts undertaken by the international community to deal with the environmental issues.

Speaking on behalf of the organisation's member countries – 19 major natural gas producers, Sentyurin emphasised that the natural gas industry looks seriously to technology options that can further promote decarbonisation potential of natural gas, including carbon capture, utilisation and sequestration options, and production of hydrogen from natural gas.

This adds to other progress in efficiency and digitalisation that enables a substantial reduction of greenhouse gases emissions along the entire supply chain.

Furthermore, the current expansion and technology progress of natural gas vehicles (NGVs) across the world offers a valuable opportunity to reduce emissions in the transportation sector.

GECF's strong belief in the role of constructive international

co-operation as a driver for effective global responses to climate change and sustainable development was specifically highlighted by the speaker.

Meanwhile, the professional community's main concern is that in the era of energy transitions, introduction of discriminatory regulation against cleaner hydrocarbon fuels such as natural gas, disturbs overall gas markets design, undermines investment in critical gas transport infrastructure and new gas supply projects. Natural gas is a balanced solution that contributes substantially to reducing carbon intensity and pollution resulting from energy-related activities, supports access to modern energy, improves availability of supply, and provides affordable energy.

The "blue fuel" can also be a vector of increased co-operation and technology transfer between energy stakeholders. These credentials have been explicitly recognised in the G20 Ministerial Meeting on Energy Transitions and Global Environment for Sustainable Growth in Japan early this year.

The GECF engagement in the UNFCCC as an observer organisation marks the willingness to contribute to scale up the Member Countries' collective actions in order to reduce the environmental footprint of natural gas.

In this context, the GECF has initiated the Environmental Actions Framework that aims to create a supportive platform allowing Member Countries to share best practices dealing with the environmental challenges, building capabilities and establishing progressive research collaborations on various environment-related topics. This commitment is largely anchored in the GECF Heads of State Declarations including the recent one adopted in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea and the Organisation's Long-Term Strategy.

In line with this environmental ambition, the GECF has reinforced its co-operation with various organisations to strengthen its research activity, exchange expertise and develop studies related to the interactions between energy and our environment.

Study outcomes are to be translated into concrete

recommendations on energy policy actions for the GECF Member Countries.
At the same time, the recently established GECF Gas Research Institute is set to become a pivotal project for the organisation with the aim to develop technical knowledge and innovative technologies that reduce GHGs emissions.

Qatar to sequester 7mn tonnes of CO2 by 2027, says al-Kaabi

Looking to advance efforts on sustainable development and the protection of the environment, Qatar is expected to increase its CO2 sequestration to 7mn tonnes by 2027, HE the Minister of State for Energy Affairs Saad bin Sherida al-Kaabi said yesterday.
Al-Kaabi, who is also the president and CEO of Qatar Petroleum (QP), made the statement during the panel session titled 'The Future of LNG in Meeting the World's Energy Demand' at the Doha Forum, which concludes today (December 15). Joining the minister during the panel discussion are ENI CEO Claudio Descalzi and Total chairman and CEO Patrick Pouyanné.
According to al-Kaabi, Qatar had started to sequester 2.5mn tonnes of CO2 this year, which is expected to reach 5mn tonnes by 2024. He stressed that many companies in the oil and gas sector "are trying to reduce" CO2 emissions and "looking at the environment more critically."

“In the oil and gas industry, we take responsibility in what we do with carbon capture, storage, and looking at the environment in general. In Qatar, we’ve announced that we’ve started this year’s 2.5mn tonnes of CO2 sequestration.

“In addition to that, with the expansion that we have announced earlier, by 2024 we will reach 5mn tonnes, and maybe for the first time, I can announce that we are going to reach about 7mn tonnes by 2027,” al-Kaabi said.

“We have a responsibility to do more and I think most of the companies are being responsible, but for humanity, you need more energy and there are going to be developments that are required, otherwise, you can’t have developments because renewables alone cannot keep up with the growth requirements,” he continued.

Commenting on the future of LNG and its impact on the environment, al-Kaabi said Qatar looks at gas “as a destination fuel rather than a transition fuel.”

“I definitely think that renewable energy is going to be part of the solution…there are a lot of countries that are moving away from coal in favour of natural gas, while some are abandoning nuclear energy for various reasons, so we see gas as the future,” he pointed out.

The minister also said Qatar is looking at Asian countries, citing upcoming peak demand from countries, such as China and India, as well as the development of countries in Southeast Asia.

“We are increasing our production capacity; currently, we are producing 77mn tonnes per year (tpy). We already announced that we will reach 110mn tpy by 2024. Recently, we announced a further development, taking production capacity to 126mn tpy by 2027.

“We think there is a requirement for gas in the future; peak demand is coming from a lot of growing economies, such as China, India, which are the largest growth areas. Demand is also being driven by countries in Southeast Asia due to various infrastructure development projects,” al-Kaabi said.

He added: “Asia is our focus area; considering its sheer

population, it is the biggest growth area. As for developed nations, mostly in Europe, we supply the entire continent, particularly those that use LNG. It is a big market and we don't see ourselves in competition with anybody, but rather we focus on what we control, which is our cost…we want to be efficient, safe, and reliable."

A new hope for US climate action

The United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP25) currently taking place in Madrid is supposed to prepare the ground for more ambitious national climate commitments. Nowhere is this more important than in the country where national leadership on climate change is least likely: the United States.

But a new report should give the world hope that it's not too late to keep the U.S. on a path in line with global

aspirations to avoid the most catastrophic effects of climate change. This will require continued leadership from American states, cities and businesses that are already stepping up, combined with reinvigorated action from the federal government.

The U.S. is the world's second-largest emitter of greenhouse gases, and was the largest overall emitter for decades. Although China surpassed it in 2006, America's cumulative emissions remain unmatched. And yet, far from leading the way on climate action, the U.S. under President Donald Trump's administration has rolled back many federal climate and environmental rules and formally indicated its intention to withdraw from the 2015 Paris climate agreement by late next year.

Fortunately, the rest of the U.S. is not following Trump's lead. Across the country, a massive coalition of states, cities, businesses, universities, and others have declared that "We Are Still In." Despite the federal government's official withdrawal from the Paris agreement, they will take the necessary steps to fulfill America's climate commitments.

This is no pie-in-the-sky declaration. The coalition's more than 3,800 participants (and counting) include states, cities, and counties that account for 65 percent of the U.S. population, nearly 70 percent of U.S. GDP equivalent to an economy larger than China's and over half of U.S. emissions. For example, 145 U.S. cities have committed to 100 percent clean electricity, and six have already achieved it.

But serious questions remain. How much progress can this coalition make to reduce emissions without the federal government's support? And how much better would the situation be if the U.S. administration and Congress recommit to climate action?

These are the questions that America's Pledge, a Bloomberg

Philanthropies initiative, has been working to answer over the last year.

The conclusions are both reassuring and daunting. According to the initiative's just-released third report, "Accelerating America's Pledge" (produced in collaboration with the Rocky Mountain Institute, the University of Maryland and the World Resources Institute), stronger action by states, cities and businesses could reduce U.S. greenhouse-gas emissions by 37 percent (compared to 2005 levels) by 2030.

In other words, even without the federal government, the U.S. can drastically reduce emissions, improve air quality and stimulate broad-based economic gains. Success would require an expanded coalition of non-federal actors to move quickly and ambitiously to transform energy and transportation systems, including by building on the innovative measures that U.S. states, cities and businesses are already taking.

The impact of such a movement promises to extend beyond U.S. borders, with bottom-up commitments in the country leveraged to increase climate ambition around the world. This is already starting to happen. For example, Alliances for Climate Action connects cities, states, the private sector, investors, universities and civil-society organizations in Argentina, Japan, Mexico, South Africa, the U.S. and Vietnam, so that they can work with one another and with their national governments to spur climate action.

But the role of the national government remains important. Despite the potential of bottom-up climate leadership, the fact remains that the results are much better when combined with top-down coordination and oversight. The America's Pledge report shows that aggressive U.S. federal re-engagement on climate action in the form of a comprehensive "all-in" strategy could reduce emissions by 49 percent by 2030, putting the country on track to reach net-zero emissions by mid-century.

So, despite three years of federal indifference, all hope for effective climate action in the U.S. is not lost. But we cannot afford to rest easy. The needed transformation will require broad citizen mobilization, increased energy productivity, disruptive innovation, updated market structures and forward-thinking investment. The U.S. Congress and executive branch must take aggressive, quick action, placing climate change and the associated economic transformation at the top of the policy agenda.

The rewards would be tremendous. Beyond environmental benefits, the changes outlined in the America's Pledge report, if designed well and implemented efficiently, could boost prosperity, lower consumer costs and improve public health. By 2030, the economic transformation could deliver equal or better performance in electricity, vehicles, and buildings compared to fossil-fuel technologies and at a lower price.

For example, it is already cheaper to shut down coal-fired power plants and replace them with wind and solar than it is to keep the plants online. In addition, the transition will create new job opportunities and the careers of the future, including in renewable energy, electric vehicle manufacturing and sustainable forestry (among others). Recent analysis by the Global Commission on the Economy and Climate shows that smart climate action can create global economic gains of $26 trillion by 2030, as well as generating 65 million jobs.

Non-federal U.S. actors have laid a strong foundation for climate action, and they continue to drive progress. But to achieve the necessary transformation as quickly as required, more elected U.S. officials and national leaders will need to step up.

Jules Kortenhorst is CEO of the Rocky Mountain Institute. Andrew Steer is president and CEO of the World Resources Institute.

(www.project-syndicate.org)

Time for adaptation to climate change

As world leaders gather in Madrid for the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP25), they must address more than future targets for reducing greenhouse-gas emissions.

They must also address the harm to people and livelihoods that climate change is already causing.

Strengthening our ability to adapt to climate change has never been more urgent.

Many regions are experiencing major difficulties as a result of higher global temperatures and changing weather patterns.

We must do more to help citizens and governments tackle issues such as rising sea levels, wildfires, hurricanes and other natural disasters, and increased coastal erosion.

Even if we meet the Paris agreement’s goal of limiting the

average global temperature increase to well below 2C, at least 570 cities and some 800mn people will be at risk from rising sea levels and more frequent and destructive storms.
And these dangers will grow as temperatures climb ever higher.
The very existence of some island countries and coastal communities will be threatened.
It is thus essential to reduce the risks that climate change poses to humans and the economy.
Unless action is taken, climate change will reduce global GDP per capita by more than 7% by 2100, with equally severe consequences for countries, whether they are rich or poor, hot or cold.
The economic and broader social benefits of adaptation to climate change are clear.
In September, the Global Commission on Adaptation issued a report calling on governments, businesses, and communities to take urgent action to step up adaptation measures.
The report finds that an investment of $1.8tn across five key areas – early warning systems, resilient infrastructure, agriculture, mangrove protection, and resilient water supplies – from 2020 to 2030 could generate $7.1tn in benefits.
Still, today's investment gap is huge.
The climate challenge demands much deeper co-operation between the public and private sector to increase green investment.
We need to ensure that infrastructure is built to cope with the increased impact of climate change and develop clear global standards for disclosing the climate risks that investment projects pose.
For example, how will a city cope with increased flood risk, and how will agricultural land be maintained productively as droughts grow more severe? Big and small investors alike should know exactly how their money could be affected by a changing climate.
Here, public investment institutions like the European Investment Bank can assist with adaptation in many ways.
The EIB has long invested in projects that reduce emissions and help countries adapt to climate change.

But now we are making even larger strides toward strengthening adaptation, by deepening our expertise, creating new systems to ensure the resilience of our investments, and working closely with the public and private sectors.

For example, we will no longer fund infrastructure projects that are not climate resilient.

Accordingly, we have introduced a climate risk-management system, and are adding climate adaptation criteria to all infrastructure projects.

The EIB will also be focusing on adaptation from the very earliest stages of project preparation, both through advisory services and technical assistance.

Whereas we have gained much experience in the field, many of our public- and private-sector clients may lack the resources or expertise to assess climate risks.

For example, the EIB has been working closely with the Caribbean Development Bank to ensure that all of its projects consider climate risks, and to develop a pipeline of climate-friendly investment projects worth more than $300mn.

Finally, the EIB plans to increase its support for innovative technologies such as weather analytics and climate-resilient food systems, to help companies, individuals, and communities prepare for climate change.

To that end, the EIB now supports the Climate Resilience and Adaptation Finance and Technology Transfer Facility (CRAFT), the first private-sector fund dedicated to addressing these problems in developing countries.

The EIB is also raising its climate-finance target, so that at least 50% of its lending will support environmental sustainability by 2025 – an increase from around 30% today.

And by 2030, the EIB Group plans to support $1.1tn of climate action and environmental sustainability investments through loans and grants, including for developing countries to help them strengthen the resilience of roads, railways, ports, farmland, sanitation and drinking water systems, and digital-communication networks.

Underinvestment in adaptation is particularly a problem for

low-income countries, most of which are located in hotter, more vulnerable regions.
Supporting these countries' efforts to adapt to climate change is essential to their ability to develop.
Yet we also must not lose sight of the big picture.
The higher global temperatures rise, the less we will be able to rely on adaptation.
Scientists estimate that we are now heading for a temperature increase of 3-4C by the end of the century, with disastrous consequences for people around the world.
The world's most vulnerable populations are already bearing the brunt of climate change, because they are the most exposed to the risks and have the fewest resources with which to adapt.
But, given that all cities, regions, and countries are facing some type of climate risk, the adaptation imperative simply cannot be ignored. – Project Syndicate

* Emma Navarro is Vice President of the European Investment Bank.

Climate change crisis: global action needed before it's too late

Scientists said that average temperatures from 2010-2019 look set to make it the warmest decade on record.

Provisional figures released by the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) suggest this year is on course to be the second or third warmest year ever.

If those numbers hold, 2015-2019 would end up being the warmest five-year period in the record.

This “exceptional” global heat is driven by greenhouse gas emissions, the WMO says.

The organisation’s State of the Global Climate report for 2019 covers the year up to October, when the global mean temperature for the period was 1.1C above the “baseline” level in 1850.

Many parts of the world experienced unusual levels of warmth this year.

South America, Europe, Africa, Asia and Oceania were warmer than the recent average, while many parts of North America were colder than usual.

Two major heat waves hit Europe in June and July this year, with a new national record of 46C set in France on June 28.

New national records were also set in Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg and the UK.
In Australia, the mean summer temperature was the highest on record by almost a degree.
Wildfire activity in South America this year was the highest since 2010.
The WMO clearly links the record temperatures seen over the past decade to ongoing emissions of greenhouse gases, from human activities such as driving cars, cutting down forests and burning coal for energy.
“On a day-to-day basis, the impacts of climate change play out through extreme and ‘abnormal’ weather.
And, once again in 2019, weather and climate-related risks hit hard,” said the WMO’s secretary-general Petteri Taalas.
“Heatwaves and floods which used to be ‘once in a century’ events are becoming more regular occurrences. Countries ranging from the Bahamas to Japan to Mozambique suffered the effect of devastating tropical cyclones. Wildfires swept through the Arctic and Australia,” Taalas continued.
“It’s shocking how much climate change in 2019 has already led to lives lost, poor health, food insecurity and displaced populations,” said Dr Joanna House, from the University of Bristol.
The World Health Organisation (WHO) has warned that climate change is mostly affecting human health, affirming that it causes the death of 7mn people annually in the world’s various regions.
A large number of people suffer annually from pollution, heat stress, injuries and deaths resulting from extreme climate variability and insect-borne diseases such as Malaria, revealed Maria Neira, Director of WHO’s Department of Environment, Climate Change and Health, in a report about the impact of climate change on human health, during the UN Climate Change Conference in Madrid.
Neira urged governments to take serious measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, as air pollution and climate change kill 7mn people annually.

“Health is paying the price of the climate crisis, because our lungs, our brains, our cardiovascular system is very much suffering from the causes of climate change which are overlapping very much with the causes of air pollution,” said Neira, calling the lower than 1% of international financing for climate action that goes to the health sector “not enough and absolutely outrageous”. The Director considered climate change as potentially the greatest health threat of the 21st Century, explaining that governments find difficulties in obtaining international climate finance to protect the health of their people and prevent the effects of this ongoing climate change.
The Climate Change Conference in Madrid, we hope, will strengthen the global action against this climate emergency and fulfil Paris’ climate agreement starting 2020.

Will Judges Have the Last Word on Climate Change?

In the fight against climate change, one tool is proving increasingly popular: litigation. From the U.S. to India, activists, governments and concerned citizens are suing at a breakneck pace. Supporters want the courts to force oil companies, energy users and governments to pay for past harms and avert future threats. Opponents say climate change policy is a matter for national governments and international treaties, not a handful of judges.

1. Why turn to the courts?

Activists and environmentally minded lawyers are seeking new ways to use the law to slow global warming and assign responsibility for the resulting economic damages. They've been given new urgency by President Donald Trump's decision to remove the U.S. from the 2015 Paris climate agreement. Some believe courts are uniquely suited to impose controls where legislatures and government agencies have failed. U.S. states and cities seeking redress in the courts say it is the only avenue open to them as the federal government has spent the past three years trying to undo climate regulations put in

place by President Barack Obama.

2. Who are the defendants?

In the U.S., it’s mostly the big oil companies, but energy producers and state and federal agencies have also been sued. Governments are the targets in much of the rest of the world, including Canada, Pakistan, India and Uganda. In Europe, local and national governments have been sued because their clean-air plans fail to meet minimum European Union requirements. These include emissions caps that target older, less efficient diesel cars that are more harmful to the environment.

3. What’s the argument?

Some claim the oil and gas industry created a “public nuisance” – an illegal threat to community welfare. Others target their products as unreasonably dangerous to the planet’s health. In the U.S., state officials have claimed that the oil corporations knew about the dangers of climate change for decades and schemed to hide the information. Many cases are based on the claim that the health of the environment is a public trust, held by the government for the benefit of future generations.

4. So it’s about human rights?

Yes, human-rights arguments are a small but growing approach. Plaintiffs make the case that climate change has threatened or taken away the basic rights to shelter, health, food, water and even life. Arguments range from Colombian children’s claims that the deforestation of the Amazon deprives them of a healthy environment, to the assertion of hundreds of elderly Swiss women that their country has not done enough to protect them from rising global temperatures.

5. How have governments responded?

They argue that judges should not be setting government policies. And they often say that the social and economic benefits from pollution sources outweigh the environmental concerns. That was the case South Africa made when it was challenged for building a coal-fired power station, since 16 percent of the population still has no access to electricity.

6. What about energy companies?

They point to the vast economic benefits created by their products. And they say that individuals, industries and governments willingly contributed to climate change through their use of fossil fuels. They deny seeking to mislead consumers about global warming and accuse plaintiffs' lawyers of demonizing them in search of a big bonanza.

7. How have the cases fared?

Environmentalists have won major cases against the Netherlands, Colombia and South Africa. And pending suits have changed behaviors. Germans, for example, are avoiding buying diesel cars since more of them are getting banned from cities that fail to meet standards for particulate matter and nitrogen oxides.

8. How have lawsuits fared in the U.S.?

Initially badly. A federal judge threw out a suit by New York City against five of the world's biggest oil companies in 2018. (An appeals court is considering the city's arguments to reinstate the case.) But the Trump administration, like its predecessor, has so far been unsuccessful in derailing a suit brought by youths who claim the government's role in causing climate change is a violation of their Constitutional rights. A federal appeals court in San Francisco is considering

whether the case can go forward to trial. There are more than a dozen “public nuisance” lawsuits seeking to hold energy companies responsible for billions of taxpayer dollars spent on acclimating to a warming world, or picking up the pieces following unprecedented hurricanes, floods and wildfires. Exxon Mobil Corp. is being sued in New York City (the trial is over and a judge is considering the case) and Massachusetts for allegedly hiding its early knowledge of climate change from the public and misleading investors about the future financial impact of global warming.

9. Why do environmentalists keep trying?

They’re seeking their tobacco moment. Anti-smoking activists and the families of cancer-stricken smokers lost claims against Big Tobacco for decades in the U.S. before the 1990s. A group of state attorneys general turned the tide by teaming up with top private lawyers to take on the industry in state courts. The victory resulted in settlements totaling $246 billion and permanent changes in the sale and marketing of cigarettes. It’s a model that climate change activists would love to duplicate.

Persistent emissions signal global climate goal out of reach

Bloomberg/ Sydney/New York

Wednesday, 04 December 2019 10:07 PM

While global carbon emissions growth is slowing, the persistent rise is a warning that governments aren't doing enough to stave off the worst consequences of climate change, according to a new report.

Carbon-dioxide emissions from burning fossil fuels likely increased by 0.6% this year, down from 2.1% in 2018, according to a report from the Australia-based Global Carbon Project. Declines in the US and Europe were offset by increases in the fast-growing economies of China and India, it said.

"Current climate and energy policies are not enough to reverse the trends in global emissions," the report's authors said in a press release. "Continued support for low-carbon technologies need to be combined with policies directed at phasing out the use of fossil fuels."

The warning comes as envoys from nearly 200 countries gather this week for UN-organised climate talks, aimed at implementing the 2015 Paris Agreement to limit fossil fuel pollution, and as a global protest movement calling for tougher action on climate change gathers momentum. The global climate outlook is "bleak" and the planet's pathway back to a safe climate is narrowing, the UN warned last week.

The increasingly dire estimates about the pace of climate change are leading to calls for more extreme solutions than the actions that nations have already committed to.

The slowdown in global emissions growth was still significant, Canadell said. Given the margin of error in the projection, an actual decline could not be ruled out, he added.

“It’s never good news when emissions go up, but it’s still not as bad as I had feared,” said Corinne Le Quere, professor of climate science at the University of East Anglia and a member of the GCP.

The GCP results were published in three different journals: an atlas of international emissions in Environmental Research Letters, an analysis of emissions by fuel type in Nature Climate Change and a planetary overview in Earth System Science Data.

Coal use accounted for 42% of global emissions from fossil fuels, but its importance in power generation is on the wane. In the US, an abundant supply of cheap natural gas is helping accelerate the transition away from the dirtiest fuel.

At the same time, increased gas use was an important driver of emissions growth in 2019, Canadell said.

China’s emissions growth is projected at 2.6% this year, similar to the pace in 2017 and 2018 and the nation is catching up with European emissions on an individual basis at about 6.7 tonnes per person per year. India’s increase is expected to ease to around 1.8% from 8% last year, due to an economic slowdown and a particularly wet monsoon season, which saw strong hydropower generation displace some coal-fired generation.

“The failure to mitigate global emissions, despite positive progress on so many aspects of climate policy, suggests that the full bag of policy options is not being effectively deployed,” the report said.

Amid climate worries, Mexico

doubles down on fossil fuels

On the same September day that activist Greta Thurnberg gave a fiery speech in New York demanding world leaders tackle climate change, Mexico's president was touting achievements of a wholly different kind: increasing funding for oil production.

"We're investing in refineries. It hasn't been done for a long time," President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador told reporters at a news conference in Mexico City.

"What was invested this year is going to be repeated next year," promised Lopez Obrador, noting that the government had already funnelled more than 12bn pesos ($600mn) towards revamping oil production.

The leftist leader, who was elected in a landslide last July, has framed the investment as a way to wean Mexico off its dependency on foreign energy supplies, as well as fuelling economic development through increased oil production.

But at a time when countries are facing mounting pressure to curb emissions and stave off threats from a warming climate, environmental experts say the Mexican government is moving in the wrong direction.

"While Mexico should be abandoning (oil) production, they're rehabilitating refineries … under a logic of national sovereignty," said Leon Avila, a professor of sustainable development at the Intercultural University of Chiapas.

"It's an archaic perspective, based on production in the 70s during the oil boom, and they think they can do the same thing – when really we're in another context," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Last Monday, Mexico's government announced it would expand the rules of its "clean energy certificates" (CEL) programme to make them available to older hydroelectric plants operated by state utility company CFE.

The programme previously applied only to new projects, creating an incentive for local and foreign firms to invest in green energy.

The CEL-certified energy can be sold to big companies that are required to obtain a percentage of their electricity from clean sources.

But in a statement on Tuesday, CFE director general Manuel Bartlett Diaz said that, in line with the president's vision for energy sovereignty, there was "no reason to subsidise private (electricity) generating companies". Industry leaders and environmental experts said the move weakens incentives for renewable energy investment, and risks Mexico's compliance with the 2015 Paris Agreement to fight climate change.

The Mexican CCE business council said on Tuesday that the change could jeopardise up to $9bn in foreign and local clean energy investments tied to the original CEL rules.

"The decision detracts from the only mechanism considered by law to drive Mexico's energy transition and meet the mandatory national clean energy adoption goals," the CCE said in a statement.

The Lopez Obrador administration has emphasised its commitment to tackle climate change and adhere to the Paris accord.

At a UN climate conference last December, Sergio Sanchez, then undersecretary for environmental protection, said the government would implement "concrete policies and actions focused both on reducing emissions and adapting to climate change".

The Mexican senate last week also called on the federal government to declare a "climate emergency" and take necessary steps to address climate threats.

Those can range from wilder weather and rising seas to more crop-killing droughts that can drive worsening poverty and migration.

But at a press conference the following day, the president shied away from recognising climate change as a crisis.

“We have already considered a series of measures to face the climate change phenomenon in the Development Plan,” Lopez Obrador said.

But the president’s description of the plan – listing conservation efforts but omitting any policies to reduce emissions – irked environmentalists.

“There is a lack of understanding for the climate crisis we are confronting,” said Claudia Campero from the Mexican Alliance Against Fracking, an advocacy group.

According to Avila, the university professor, the president has prioritised ending Mexico’s entrenched poverty but is using oil as the primary engine to drive prosperity.

“He should care about climate change, but between climate change and going down in history for ending poverty…

well obviously he prefers that,” Avila said.

Among Lopez Obrador’s most important projects is the construction of a new oil refinery in his home state of Tabasco.

The project is set to cost $8bn, and the government says it would generate up to 23,000 jobs.

But besides boosting Mexico’s carbon footprint, the refinery, at a coastal site, is vulnerable to climate threats, environmental experts said.

Local media reported this week that the property had flooded due to heavy rains.

Environmentalists also point with concern to the government’s proposed 2020 budget, which would see fossil fuel funding continue to increase.

Under the proposal, the energy ministry’s budget would jump more than 70% compared to last year, to 48.5bn pesos ($2.4bn), following a budget increase this year of over 900% compared to 2018.

According to an analysis of the budget published in September by a coalition of environmental groups, 96% of the money is intended to support oil and natural gas related projects.

“There is no room for more development of fossil fuel extraction,” said Campero, the fracking opponent.” (But) that’s far from being the vision of this government.”

The budget does include about 56bn pesos ($2.8bn) for “adaptation and mitigation of the effects of climate change,” but of this, 70% is being set aside for transporting natural gas, a somewhat cleaner fossil fuel, Campero said.

A spokeswoman for the Mexican environment ministry did not respond to numerous requests for comment.

Conspicuously absent from the budget, advocates say, is funding for expanding renewables, despite the country’s potential to adopt clean energy.

According to a 2017 study from the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, which focuses on promoting democracy and social programmes, 80% of Mexico’s energy currently comes from fossil fuels.

But the country’s landscape and weather conditions mean it could supply its electricity needs entirely from renewable sources, the study noted.

The Lopez Obrador administration has appeared reticent to capitalise on this potential, however.

In January, the government cancelled a public auction for companies to bid on clean energy contracts.

“Mexico is a very rich country in terms of its potential in renewables,” said Pablo Ramirez, a campaigner at Greenpeace Mexico.

“But since the arrival of the new administration, that’s been completely scrubbed off the map.”

Mexico’s 2020 budget is awaiting final approval by congress this month. – Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Qatar stresses role of natural gas in meeting economic and environmental challenges

Qatar has stressed the importance of natural gas in meeting the economic and environmental challenges facing energy consumers around the world.

Many countries around the world are searching for the right balance of reliable and secure sources of energy, which can drive their growth, while addressing environmental concerns at the same time, HE the Minister of State for Energy Affairs Saad bin Sherida al-Kaabi told the 21st ministerial meeting of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF).

“In this effort, many are discovering the versatile, flexible, economic, and environmental qualities of natural gas as a key enabler in the journey to achieve a lower-carbon economy,” he said.

He stressed on Qatar’s commitment to ensuring the continued availability of reliable LNG (liquefied natural gas) supplies to world markets, and to promoting greater growth in the LNG industry, as well as to serving the growing needs of its clients.

“We all have the same objective: To place natural gas at the heart of the energy industry as a fuel of the future to affirm

our true belief that natural gas is a cornerstone in the energy transition and a destination fuel, not merely a transition fuel," he said.

Drawing attention to unprecedented recurrent climatic conditions, including mean temperatures, turbulent seasonal cycles and extreme events, al-Kaabi had recently said it is time to take another look at natural gas and the number of advantages it has to make it a pivotal element in any strategy to tackle environmental challenges.

Qatar has highlighted the efforts to reinforce its position as the world's leading LNG producer, which include the North Field expansion to increase the LNG production capacity to 110mn tonnes per annum by 2024, and a major ship-building campaign to build up to 100 LNG carriers over the next decade.