

A Change of Climate for Climate Change

Terence Jeyaretnam

It was only six months ago in this column that I wrote that "some experts have already started indicating that the current record \$US55 per barrel may well go to \$US80 per barrel within the next three years, which would mean doubling in price within a decade". Well, the price is already \$US71 and rising. Rising in the same direction as the mercury, which makes the brew of global greenhouse issues a fascinating behavioural study on anthropogenic thinking beyond the backyard. And, paradoxically, as a global subject, it remains unleavened.

Mirroring Orwellian theory, roles of key actors are morphing. Recently, big Australian business broke ranks to call on the Federal Government to take tough action to reduce Australia's greenhouse gas emissions. IAG chief executive Michael Hawker, speaking at the release of the group's report, blamed climate change for a massive rise in weather-related calamities, including cyclones, floods, high winds and hailstorms. I have invited Mr. Hawker to give his perspectives to engineers via this column – so watch this space. The Federal opposition is discussing an emissions trading scheme. John Howard wants China and the United States to be engaged first.

The Independent recently reported that "Sea ice in the Arctic has failed to re-form for the second consecutive winter, raising fears that global warming may have tipped the polar regions in to irreversible climate change far sooner than predicted".

BBC reported recently that the UK government's chief scientific adviser, Professor Sir David King, said the new data, a record rise of 2.6 ppm of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere in 2005, highlighted the importance of taking urgent action to limit carbon emissions. "Today we're over 380 ppm," he said. "That's higher than we've been for over a million years, possibly 30 million years. Mankind is changing the climate."

In a remarkable shift with far-reaching policy implications, prominent U.S. news organizations are declaring the debate on climate change "over." A recent cover story in Time magazine and significant coverage by ABC News' "World News Tonight" both acknowledge the overwhelming scientific consensus on global warming. As the Time story says, "By any measure, Earth is at the tipping point.... Suddenly and unexpectedly, the crisis is upon us."

In a climate (pun-intended) of greenhouse mafia and the dirty dozen, the jagged edge of the nuclear pill, signs of a feverish planet and the nascent radiance of the colour of money, we the electorate remain dutiful to our leaders to do better than Emperor Nero when Rome was burning.

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