



the weekly anthropocene

dispatches from the wild, weird world of humanity and its biosphere



By Sam Matey, September 30, 2020

China. In a video address to the socially distanced UN General Assembly on September 22nd (pictured), Chinese President Xi Jinping made a surprise announcement: that China would peak its carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality by 2060. Early estimates calculate that if China achieves this goal (which would require a massive remaking of the world's



largest economy to run on renewables instead of coal, oil, and gas) it would lower projected warming by 0.2 to 0.3 degrees Celsius. (For context, about 1.1 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial norm has resulted in global warming to date). In short, this still isn't enough to really get a handle on global warming, but it's a heck of a lot more than anyone thought that China was going to commit to, and would be a big step in preventing the worst-case scenarios. It's huge, impactful, and excellent news! Now, if Biden wins in America and gets his climate plan passed, the world's three largest economies and emitters-China, America, and the European Union-will be united behind the goal of ditching fossil fuels by mid-century. If that's followed through, it could truly be the dawn of an awesome Anthropocene! For more, see tinyurl.com/China2060 and tinyurl.com/China2060Questions.

Maine. In Maine's largest renewable energy procurement ever, the Maine Public Utilities Commission has approved contracts for 17 new renewable energy projects, with a total generating capacity of 492 megawatts of power-approximately enough to power about 64,000 Maine homes. Solar power dominated, accounting for 14 of the projects and the great



majority of the new power to be generated. (For comparison, Maine currently has about 90 megawatts of solar installed in the entire state). The other three winners were a new five-turbine wind farm and new work at existing hydroelectric and biomass facilities. These new projects are a direct result of the bill signed into law by Governor Mills in 2019 mandating that Maine get 80% of its electricity from renewables by 2030, and setting a goal of 100% by 2050. This is what progress looks like! For more, see tinyurl.com/MaineRenewablesProcurement.



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California: Fires and Deaths. Stanford researchers have found that this year's horrendous California wildfires, which blanketed the state in dense and dangerous smoke for much of August and September, likely caused many more deaths than previously thought. (Pictured: a satellite image of the smoke over the West Coast on September 10). Using Medicare data, the researchers calculated that the choking, sooty smoke likely led to 4,800 additional visits to the emergency room in Californians over 65 and 1,200 deaths that would not have otherwise happened. "These are hidden deaths. These are people who were probably already sick but for whom air pollution made them even sicker," said Stanford Professor Michael Burke. Atrocious. For more, see tinyurl.com/CASmokeDeaths.



California: Vehicles. As his state is ravaged by unnatural disasters, California Governor Gavin Newsom has taken a much-needed step forward to lead the nation in addressing one of the root causes. On September 23rd, Governor Newsom (pictured) issued an executive order using the authority of the California Air Resources Board to require that by 2035, all new cars and passenger trucks sold in California must be zero-emission vehicles. Selling new gas-powered clunkers will be banned (though possession won't be: keeping and reselling old gas cars will be fine). This is a first for an American jurisdiction, but is a logical step towards addressing a major source of carbon emissions. A plethora of European countries, including France, the UK, Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, Ireland, and Norway, have already set similar ban dates, as well as Israel and Singapore. This is the kind of smart, achievable, forward-thinking action that needs to become the norm. Great news! For more, see tinyurl.com/CaliforniaCarProgress and tinyurl.com/CACarFAQs.





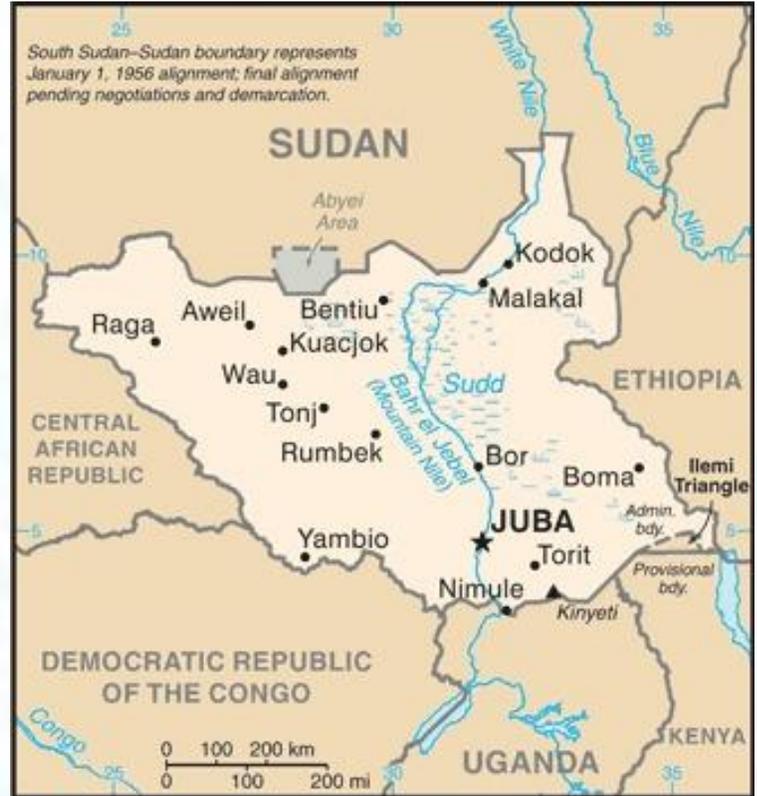
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South Sudan. Severe flooding of the Nile has forced over 600,000 people in the impoverished African nation of South Sudan (pictured, map from the CIA World Factbook) to flee their homes since July. Scientists report that the flooding was caused by torrential rains from a cyclical weather pattern made worse by climate change. Reuters quoted Kok Mandok, age 70, who had fled his village of Dorok. ““The water level reached almost halfway up my body,” he said, in his native Dinka language. “There are no shelters for me and my grandchildren, our cattle are gone and we are sleeping under a tree.” This is the nastiest and most unfair part of the climate crisis: it punches down. Rich fossil fuel executives can hide in air conditioned, ventilated, or seawall-protected mansions, while hundreds of thousands of subsistence farmers who’ve just been through years of war get the little they have destroyed by a turbulent atmosphere they did nothing to induce. They get no justice. For more, see tinyurl.com/SouthSudanFloods.



Botswana. A while back, this newsletter reported on the mysterious mass deaths of over 300 elephants in May and June in Botswana’s luxuriant Okavango Delta. (Pictured: an elephant in the Okavango in September 2019). The Botswanan government has now reported that neurotoxins produced by cyanobacteria (algae) in watering holes appears to be the culprit, and will be monitoring watering holes for early warning of toxic blooms next rainy season. “I hope that what the government has said is true, because it rules out some of the more sinister things,” said conservationist Niall McCann. It’s good news that there appears to be no deadly new X factor, like human-caused poisonings or a new elephant disease. For more, see tinyurl.com/BotswanaElephantMystery.

