Winds of Politics: Shaping Our Planet's Future

The global political landscape has witnessed significant shifts in recent months, profoundly impacting efforts to combat climate change. Populist anti-climate sentiments are on the rise in countries worldwide, and leaders who term the climate movement ‘a hoax’ are gaining attention. Current U.S. President Donald Trump has been a vocal critic of climate policies, famously advocating for increased fossil fuel extraction with slogans like "drill, baby, drill," while dismissing renewable energy sources such as wind power. His administration's withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement and rollback of environmental regulations represented a significant setback for global climate efforts. However, the recent devastating wildfires in California and the heat wave in Australia are stark reminders of the urgent need for climate action.

Positive Efforts in Climate and Environmental Movement

Despite political challenges, there have been remarkable advancements in climate and environmental efforts across the globe:

- **Climate Pledge and Actions**: The COP29 summit in Baku marked a significant milestone in global climate efforts. Key takeaways included the conclusion of the first global stocktake under the Paris Agreement, highlighting the need to accelerate climate action. The summit emphasized the transition away from fossil fuels, with a call for deep emissions cuts and increased investment in renewable energy. Additionally, the summit underscored the importance of climate finance, with commitments to mobilise substantial funds to support vulnerable nations.

- **Accelerating Energy Transition**: The European Union generated a record 47% of its energy from renewable sources in 2024, with solar power surpassing coal for the first time. The UK has also made significant strides in wind and solar energy production. As a global leader in renewable energy, China continues to expand its capacity, contributing significantly to the global shift towards cleaner energy. In 2023, China accounted for nearly 30% of the world's renewable energy capacity, with significant investments in solar, wind, and hydropower. The country installed a record 120 gigawatts (GW) of new renewable energy capacity in 2024, including 70 GW of solar power and 50 GW of wind power. China's commitment to renewable energy is part of its broader strategy to reduce carbon emissions and combat air pollution. Additionally, several traditionally Republican-led states in the U.S. have become leaders in renewable energy. Texas, Oklahoma, and Iowa are among the top states for wind energy production, while Florida and Georgia have seen significant growth in solar power.

[ALT Text: Wind Energy for communities- WRI]

- **Trends in Clean Transport:** Norway has solidified its status as the world leader in electric vehicle (EV) adoption, with an unprecedented 89% of new cars sold in 2024 being fully electric. Out of approximately 130,000 new car registrations in 2024, 115,000 were EVs, marking a remarkable transformation in any transportation sector or nation. While Norway’s situation is unique due to

its small population and affluence, the rate of transformation in this sector in large countries like China and the UK are equally impressive.

- **Transforming Our Cities**: Major cities like Paris have made significant strides in improving air quality by reducing vehicle traffic and enhancing public transport, cycling, and pedestrian facilities. Paris has implemented measures such as banning polluting diesel vehicles, expanding bike lanes, and promoting electric vehicle use. These initiatives have led to a noticeable improvement in air quality, with PM2.5 levels often falling within the "moderate" range, significantly better than previous years. Other cities are following suit, with similar initiatives being implemented in places like Copenhagen, Amsterdam, and Barcelona to promote cleaner, more sustainable urban environments.

Ongoing Environmental Challenges

While there have been positive developments, several environmental challenges persist:

- **Record High Temperatures**: The planet has been consistently recording its highest temperatures in recent years. For instance, July 2023 was the hottest month on record globally, and July 2024 saw the highest global average temperature ever recorded at 17.16°C (62.89°F).

- **Air Pollution in Major Cities**: Air pollution remains a critical issue in many major cities around the world. New Delhi, Jakarta, and Manila are among the cities with some of the highest pollution levels. In New Delhi, PM2.5 levels often exceed safe limits during this winter, leading to severe health issues. Jakarta faces similar challenges, with high levels of PM2.5 contributing to respiratory problems. Cities like Manila and Lagos also struggle with very high pollution levels, impacting the quality of life for their residents.

- **Ocean Warming and Coral Damage**: The world's oceans are warming at an alarming rate, absorbing approximately 90% of the excess heat from rising atmospheric temperatures. This has resulted in significant impacts, including sea level rise, intensified hurricanes, and alterations in ocean health and biochemistry. The last decade was the warmest on record for the oceans, with 2023 marking the warmest year ever documented. This warming is causing widespread coral bleaching, where corals expel the symbiotic algae residing in their tissues, leading to a loss of colour and essential energy sources. Coral reefs are among the most vulnerable ecosystems to climate change. Since the 1950s, the planet has lost half of its coral reefs due to rising sea temperatures, overfishing, and pollution. Coral reefs support 25% of all marine life and provide crucial habitats, coastal protection, and economic benefits to millions of people. The decline in coral reefs has resulted in a 63% drop in reef-associated biodiversity.

[ALT Text: Coral Bleaching]

- **Plastic Pollution**: Plastic waste continues to pollute oceans and waterways, harming marine life and entering the food chain. By 2050, it is estimated that there will be more plastic in the oceans than fish by weight. Global plastic production has doubled since the beginning of the century, reaching nearly 400 million metric tons per year in 2021. This increase in production

and usage has exacerbated the plastic pollution crisis, with millions of tons of plastic entering the oceans annually.

Conclusion

The recent shift in global politics has created both obstacles and opportunities for climate change efforts. Addressing ongoing challenges such as ocean warming, plastic pollution, and air quality will require sustained global cooperation and commitment. There is worldwide recognition of the urgent need for climate action, and the momentum for change continues to grow. While political setbacks, particularly in the U.S., have slowed progress in some areas, the global and local initiatives to combat climate change will not stop. Even if the U.S. pulls back, other nations and regions are committed to pushing forward with ambitious climate goals. Advancements in renewable energy and increased awareness of environmental issues offer hope for the future.

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