

Congo to Allow
More Oil Wells
In Rainforests

Policy May Accelerate
Global Warming

By RUTH MACLEAN
and DIONNE SEARCEY

DAKAR, Senegal — The Democratic Republic of Congo, home to one of the largest old-growth rainforests on earth, is auctioning off vast amounts of land in a push to become “the new destination for oil investments,” said Irene Wabiwa, who oversees the Congo Basin forest campaign for Greenpeace in Kinshasa.

The oil and gas blocks, which will be auctioned in late July, extend into Virunga National Park, the world’s most important gorilla sanctuary, as well as tropical peatlands that store vast amounts of carbon, keeping it out of the atmosphere and from contributing to global warming.

“If oil exploitation takes place in these areas, we must expect a global climate catastrophe, and we will all just have to watch helplessly,” said Irene Wabiwa, who oversees the Congo Basin forest campaign for Greenpeace in Kinshasa.

Congo’s about-face in allowing new oil drilling in environmentally sensitive areas comes eight months after its president, Félix Tshisekedi, stood alongside world leaders at the global climate summit in Glasgow and endorsed a 10-year agreement to protect its rainforest, part of the vast Congo Basin, which is second in size only to the Amazon.

The deal included international pledges of \$500 million for Congo, one of the world’s poorest nations, over the first five years.

But since then, the world’s immediate priorities have shifted.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine sent oil prices soaring and led to U.S. and British bans on Russian energy and, last week, a call to ration natural gas in Europe.

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TOM BRENNER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Shelter From the Swelter
Visitors found shade at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, as much of the U.S. saw summer’s first prolonged heat wave. Page A13.

When Those Behind a Badge Question the Vote

By ALEXANDRA BERZON
and NICK CORASANITI

LAS VEGAS — An influential network of conservative activists fixated on the idea that former President Donald J. Trump won the 2020 election is working to recruit county sheriffs to investigate elections based on the false notion that voter fraud is widespread.

The push, which two right-wing sheriffs’ groups have already endorsed, seeks to lend law enforcement credibility to the false claims and has alarmed voting rights advocates. They warn that it could cause chaos in future elections and further weaken trust in an

cent years. It is unclear how many sheriffs will ultimately wade into election matters. Many aligned with the groups are from small, rural counties.

But at least three sheriffs involved in the effort — in Michigan, Kansas and Wisconsin — have been carrying out their own investigations, clashing with election officials who warn that they are overstepping their authority and meddling in an area where they have little expertise.

“I’m absolutely sick of it,” said Pam Palmer, the clerk of Barry County, Mich., where the sheriff has carried out an investigation into the 2020 results for more than

Deniers Are Recruiting
Sheriffs, Unnering
Election Officials

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Texas Turmoil
Jolts the Race
For Governor

By J. DAVID GOODMAN

SUGAR LAND, Texas — One of the deadliest school shootings in U.S. history. The revival of a 1920s ban on abortion. The country’s worst episode of migrant death in recent memory. And an electrical grid, which failed during bitter cold, now straining under soaring heat.

The unrelenting succession of death and difficulty facing Texans over the last two months has soured them on the direction of the state, hurting Gov. Greg Abbott and making the race for governor perhaps the most competitive since Democrats last held that office in the 1990s.

Polls have shown a tightening, single-digit contest between Mr. Abbott, the two-term incumbent, and his ubiquitous Democratic challenger, the former congressman Beto O’Rourke.

Mr. O’Rourke is now raising more campaign cash than Mr. Abbott — \$27.6 million to \$24.9 million in the last filing — in a race that is likely to be among the most expensive of 2022.

Suddenly, improbably, perhaps unwisely, Texas Democrats are again daring to think — as they have in many recent election years — that maybe this could be the year.

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANNA WATTS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Some of the buildings in Sanford Solny’s formidable portfolio. There have been only 27 deed theft cases since 2014 in Brooklyn.

A Big New York Property Owner Is Accused of Stealing Homes

This article is by Stefanos Chen, Ted Clifford and Camellia Burris.

Over the past dozen years, Sanford Solny has built a New York real estate empire, snatching up small residential buildings across the city that churn out hundreds of thousands of dollars in rent.

His portfolio would be enviable but for one thing — much of it, prosecutors and homeowners contend, was stolen. In criminal charges and lawsuits, they have accused him of fraud: offering to help homeowners facing foreclosure by arranging to pay off their mortgages, while actually tricking them into signing over their buildings at bargain-basement prices. In nearly every case, the mortgage was never paid, leaving the homeowner with no property but a pile of debt.

Courts Are Slow to Act
in Deed Theft Cases

The practice is known as deed theft, and as city and state officials promised to crack down on it, they homed in on Mr. Solny. The Brooklyn district attorney, whose office has charged him with taking the

homes of seven families, called his behavior “despicable.” In Queens, prosecutors accused Mr. Solny and his associates of cheating 10 people out of their properties. The court appointed a monitor to scrutinize his transactions.

But an examination by The New York Times has found that not only is Mr. Solny still profiting from buildings under dispute, city

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Do You Babble to Your Baby?
So Does the Rest of the World.

By OLIVER WHANG

We’ve all seen it, we’ve all cringed at it, we’ve all done it ourselves: talked to a baby like it was, you know, a baby.

“Ooo, helloooooo baby!” you say, your voice lilting like a rapturously accommodating Walmart employee. Baby is utterly baffled by your unintelligible warble and your shamelessly doofus grin, but “baby so cuuuuuute!”

Regardless of whether it helps to know it, researchers recently determined that this sing-songy baby talk — more technically known as “parentese” — seems to be nearly universal to humans around the world. In the most wide-ranging study of its kind, more than 40 scientists helped to gather and analyze 1,615 voice recordings from 410 parents on six continents, in 18 languages from diverse communities: rural and urban, isolated and cosmopolitan, internet savvy and off the grid, from hunter-gatherers in Tanzania to urban dwellers in Beijing.

The results, published recently in the journal Nature Human Behavior, showed that in every one of these cultures, the way parents spoke and sang to their infants differed from the way they communicated with adults — and that those differences were profoundly similar from group to group.

“We tend to speak in this higher pitch, high variability, like, ‘Ohh, heeelloo, you’re a baaybee!’” said

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Finding Solace Amid War
In a desolate apartment complex outside Kharkiv, Ukraine, survivors take comfort in one another. PAGE A10

Medical Crimes and Nazis
A report on the University of Strasbourg’s takeover during World War II sheds light on a dark period. PAGE A4

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No More Pet Store Puppies?
A bill prohibiting the sale of dogs, cats and rabbits in New York shops awaits the governor’s decision. PAGE A15

Examining a Student’s Death
The University of Utah acknowledged missteps in its response to concerns about a student who was killed. PAGE A14

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Designer Known as Mr. Color
Carleton Varney was trained by the decorator Dorothy Draper and inherited her aversion to the bland and the beige. He was 85. PAGE D8



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Style, on the Court and Off
Players in women’s basketball are styling themselves however they want. And for many, it’s paying off. PAGE D1

A Sudden Ascent to the Top
Jonas Vingegaard, 25, won the Tour de France in only his second time riding cycling’s most prestigious race. PAGE D6

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Big Tech Wants in the Game
Companies like Apple and Amazon, seeking more viewers for their streaming services, are competing for rights to broadcast games from the N.F.L. and other sports leagues. PAGE B1

Gen Z Designers Set Up Shop
Depop, a social shopping app, became a springboard for young talent in the fashion world, and some of its most successful creators are going into business for themselves. PAGE B1

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What She Sees in Glasses
What makes Meryl Streep such a fine actress? Maybe it’s all that eyewear she puts on, takes off, waves around and sometimes even looks through. PAGE C1

