

World News Roundup



A man poses for a photo on frozen Lake Tremblant in the Laurentides region of Quebec, Canada at the foot of the Mont Tremblant on Dec 24. (AFP)

Climate

'Ticking time bomb'

'Climate disasters' take toll on children

SOUTH RIVER, Vanuatu, Dec 25, (RTRS): Each time teenager Freddy Sei hears the rumble of thunder, sees rains pound the earth in his small coastal village or watches strong winds whip palm trees, he is gripped with fear.

The 15-year-old lives in Vanuatu, under the government of **Tallis Obed Moses**, a Pacific island nation that two years ago was ravaged by monster cyclone Pam with Freddy watching as huts were blown away and water rushed in to submerge his village of South River on Erromango island.



Moses

"I was scared because the winds just took the houses away, there was heavy rain and the river banks was overflowing," said Freddy, speaking through a translator.

"I'm scared that if it ever floods at night, it will come into my house and the flood will take me away. That's one of my greatest fears," said the small-framed boy, one of nearly 200 residents of the isolated seaside community of South River — vulnerable to flooding, landslides and rising seas. A barrage of natural disasters across the low-lying Pacific islands is inflicting lasting mental trauma on children, with one healthcare expert describing it as a "ticking time bomb".

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) depression, anxiety, and suicide tend to increase after a natural disaster, according to a March report by American Psychological Association (APA).

People who survive multiple disasters, such as those living in disaster-prone areas, are likely to experience severe trauma, depression and other mental health problems, the APA said.

But children suffer the most.

"After climate events, children typically demonstrate more severe distress than adults ... Similar to physical experiences, traumatic mental experiences can have lifelong effects" and even impair brain development, said the report. As climate change exacerbates the frequency and severity of natural disasters, mental health problems are going to worsen for children, said counsellor Sisilia Siga from Empower Pacific, a mental health service provider in Fiji.

"It's going to get worse, if (climate change) continues. Especially with children since it's hard for them to handle all these things that's happening," she said in an interview in Fiji's capital Suva.

Siga said she treated villagers in coastal areas during the aftermath of Cyclone Winston last year, the worst storm ever recorded in the southern hemisphere, which crashed into Fiji, killing at least 43 and leaving tens of thousands homeless.

Flashbacks

She said she saw many children too traumatised to swim in the sea again, or having flashbacks when there were strong winds or when the ocean was at high tide.

Psychologist Loyda Santolaria, who was deployed in disasters like the 2010 Haiti earthquake, said children are often left to their own devices in the aftermath of a disaster, since many parents are too busy trying to secure food and shelter.

"The parents are unable to cope in a natural disaster, neither are they able to support their children's vulnerability and needs," Santolaria, who now works in Vanuatu with aid agency CARE International.

She said many of these children will grow up not knowing how to deal with these traumatic emotions and will become more susceptible to stressful situations.

This may lead to violence, depression, drug use or even suicide, said Alex Pheu, a mental health nurse working in Vanuatu's capital Port Vila.

"It's like a ticking time bomb. You have people who are scarred for life," said Pheu.



N'yaounda, the 17-year-old female western lowland gorilla holds her one-day-old cub in her enclosure at the Budapest Zoo in Budapest, Hungary on Dec 24. (AP)



Varela



Trump

Discovery

UNESCO recognizes Panama hats:

Cultural authorities at UNESCO have recognized the artisans of Panama for their distinctive woven hats. No, not those hats; the famed "Panama hat" comes from Ecuador.

Panama's real contribution to the world's hat heritage is the pinto, or painted hat, handmade from five different plants and a dose of swamp mud.

Production of the circular-brimmed hats is still a family affair carried out on a household scale. The industry's center is La Pintada, a district about 170 kms (105 miles) west of Panama City. Panama's President is **Juan Carlos Varela**.

"They don't have anything (artificial), no machinery; no factory as such exists here in La Pintada," said Reinaldo Quiros, a well-known artisan and designer who sells hats out of his home. "Each artisan in his own home makes the hats maintaining the techniques taught by his ancestors."

The widely known "Panama hat" is a brimmed hat traditionally made in Ecuador from the straw of the South American toquilla palm plant. The hats are thought to have earned their misleading name because many were sold in nearby Panama to prospectors traveling through that country to California during the Gold Rush.

Artisans of the truly Panamanian pinto hat start with the fibers of several plants that are cured and then woven into braids that are wrapped around a wooden form and sewn together from the crown of the hat down.

Pasion Gutierrez, 81, grows some of the plants around his house in El Jaguito outside La Pintada, while others are found high in the mountains. Gutierrez, his wife Anazaria and several of their children and grandchildren make pintoas. His eyesight doesn't allow him to do the fine needlework anymore, but he harvests, prepares

Environment

World on track for its 3rd warmest year

Hurricanes, fires ravaged planet

MIAMI, Dec 25, (AFP): Fierce hurricanes, heat waves, floods and wildfires ravaged the planet in 2017, as scientists said the role of climate change in causing or worsening certain natural disasters has grown increasingly clear.

It was also the year the world's second largest polluter, the United States, turned its back on the 196-nation Paris climate deal meant to limit global warming to under two degrees Celsius (1.5 degrees Fahrenheit) over pre-industrial levels.

President Donald Trump, who has dismissed global warming as a Chinese hoax, vowed to quit the 2015 Paris accord and tapped fossil fuel allies to key environmental posts.

His administration also dropped climate change from the list of national security threats, announced plans to auction off vast swaths of the Gulf of Mexico to oil and gas drilling, and signed a proposal to eliminate the Clean Power Plan, aimed at limiting the release of polluting greenhouse gases.

Trump says the goal is to make America a dominant source of energy for the world, and to create jobs.

"Together, we are going to start a new energy revolution — one that celebrates American production on American soil," Trump said in June.

In October, Trump signed a proclamation to make America a net energy exporter by 2026, reviving the coal industry and seeking to access the estimated \$50 trillion in untapped shale, oil, and natural gas reserves, particularly on federal lands.

While the fossil fuel industry has applauded the moves, scientists have expressed alarm.

"The Trump administration, in less than a year, has done more to under-

mine climate policy than even the worst previous administration on climate (i.e. George W Bush) had done over the course of two full terms," said Michael Mann, a climatologist and geophysicist at Pennsylvania State University, in an email to AFP.

Mann blamed the conservative billionaire Koch brothers and fossil fuel lobbyists for essentially running US environmental policy under the Trump administration.

"They must be stopped," he added, because their actions "pose an existential threat to us and our children and grandchildren."

The more fossil fuels we burn, the hotter the planet becomes due to the accumulation of heat-trapping greenhouse gases.

The world is currently on track for its third warmest year in modern times. Experts say global warming can make certain events, like floods, drought and hurricanes, more frequent and sometimes worse.

Fiercest

Among the fiercest storms seen this year were severe monsoon rains in Bangladesh, India and Nepal that killed more than 1,200 people and affected 40 million people, destroying homes, livestock and crops, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Spain and Portugal have grappled with a deadly drought that dried up rivers, killed crops and fueled wildfires.

Meanwhile, an unusually active hurricane season roiled the Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean with 17 big storms, the most since 2005.

Major, deadly hurricanes included Harvey, which flooded Texas with 50 inches (125 centimeters) of rain in some places. The massively powerful Irma devastated the Caribbean and

Florida, while Maria flattened much of Puerto Rico.

California Governor Jerry Brown, whose state is currently battling its third largest wildfire since 1932, spoke this month of how such devastation could be the "new normal."

Also:

NEW YORK: Hit by Hurricane Irma and a citrus ailment known as "Yellow Dragon Disease," Florida orange growers are bracing for potentially the worst harvest in more than a half century.

Forecasters are projecting a yield of 46 million boxes of oranges for the 2017-2018 Florida orange season, a drop of 33 percent from last year and the lowest output since at least 1944-1945, according to the US Agriculture Department.

Some areas have lost as much as 90 percent of their fruit due to winds from Irma, or root damage due to flooding.

"It may take months for growers to gauge the true scale of the impact of Hurricane Irma and years to fully recover," said **Shelley Rossetter**, a spokeswoman for the Florida Citrus Department.

Florida oranges aren't the only casualty of 2017, an unusually busy year for natural disasters in **North America**.

The massive "Thomas" wildfire, considered the second biggest fire ever in California, has damaged lemon and avocado crops in the region north of **Los Angeles**.

Hundreds of acres of producing land have burned, said **Ken Melban**, vice-president of industry affairs at the California Avocado Commission.

"It's a very unusual fire, some areas have been burned several times," Melban said. "It has a tremendous impact on growers impacted by the fire."

and braids the fibers.

On a recent day, Gutierrez said he'd gone out the night before to cut agave leaves because they believe the quality of the fibers is best when harvested under a

full moon. (AP)

Where's Santa?: It's the question every good little girl and boy asks on Christmas



In this Dec 16 photo, Pasion Gutierrez, 81, holds a finished traditional Panamanian pinto hat at his home in El Jaguito, Panama. The round hats of circular brim and tight, natural fibers are still made on a household scale with various family members typically pitching in. (AP)

Eve: When is Santa coming?

As it has done every year since the 1950s, a Canadian and American defense agency tracked the jolly old man's path around the globe in his reindeer-powered sleigh.

A 3-D, interactive website at www.noradsanta.org showed Santa on his delivery route, allowing users to click and learn more about the various cities along the way.

The Santa tracker presented by the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) dates to 1955, when a Colorado newspaper advertisement printed a phone number to connect children with St Nick but mistakenly directed them to the hotline for the military nerve center.

To avoid disappointing the little ones, NORAD's director of operations at the time, Colonel Harry Shoup, ordered his staff to check the radar to see where Santa might be and update the children on his location.

US President **Donald Trump** joined in the NORAD tradition on Sunday, answering the phone from his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida.

"What would you like more than anything?" the president asked one child.

"Building blocks, that's what I've always liked too. I always loved building blocks," Trump said after the child responded. (AFP)