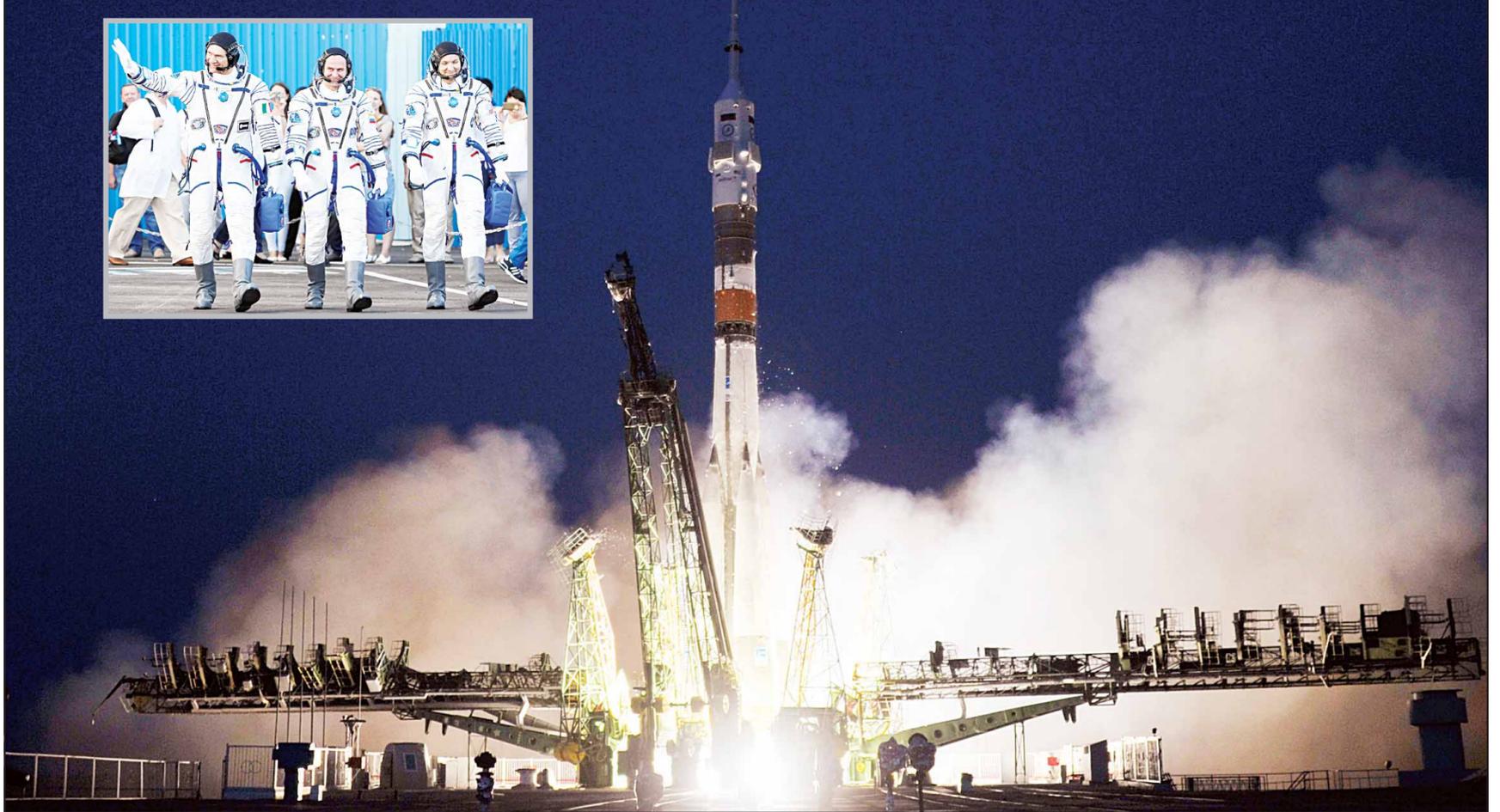


World News Roundup



Russia's Soyuz MS-05 rocket carrying a three-man crew from Italy, Russia and the United States, blasts off on July 28, from the Baikonour cosmodrome for a five-month mission on the International Space Station (ISS). (Inset) US astronaut Randy Bresnik (right), Russian cosmonaut Sergey Ryazanskiy (centre), Italian astronaut Paolo Nespoli, members of the main crew of the expedition to the International Space Station (ISS), walk prior the launch of Soyuz MS-05 space ship at the Russian leased Baikonour cosmodrome. (AFP/AP)

Three-man crew reaches space station as US boosts research

A new crew arrived at the International Space Station on Friday, giving NASA for the first time four astronauts to boost US research projects aboard the orbiting laboratory. A Russian Soyuz capsule carrying three spaceflight veterans slipped into a docking port aboard the station at 5:54 pm EDT (2154 GMT) as the \$100 billion research outpost sailed about 250 miles (400 km) over Germany, a NASA TV broadcast showed. Strapped inside the capsule, which blasted off aboard a Soyuz rocket from Kazakhstan six hours ear-

lier, were Randy Bresnik, with the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration; Sergey Ryazanskiy, with the Russian space agency Roscosmos; and Italy's Paolo Nespoli, with the European Space Agency. The men will join two NASA astronauts and a Russian cosmonaut already aboard the station, a project of 15 nations. Their arrival means the US space agency now has four crew members instead of three available for medical experiments, technology demonstrations and other

research aboard the station, the US space agency said. The extra astronaut will effectively double the amount of time for research, program manager Kirk Shireman said at a station conference last week. NASA does not oversee the Russian staff, which was reduced to two in April until a long-delayed research module joins the station next year. Previously, Russia flew three cosmonauts, with the remaining three positions filled by a combination of European, Japanese, Canadian and US astronauts, who

are trained and overseen by NASA. By the end of next year, NASA intends to begin flying astronauts aboard space taxis under development by SpaceX and Boeing. Both spaceships have room for a fourth seat, bumping the station's overall crew size to seven once Russia returns to full staffing. NASA is using the station to prepare for human missions to the moon and Mars and to stimulate commercial space transportation, pharmaceutical research, manufacturing and other businesses. (RTS)

Environment

India to curb floods

AI can help Congo to preserve its rainforest

LONDON, July 29. (RTRS): A new technique using artificial intelligence to predict where deforestation is most likely to occur could help the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) preserve its shrinking rainforest and cut carbon emissions, researchers have said.



Maschler

Congo's rainforest, the world's second-largest after the Amazon, is under pressure from farms, mines, logging and infrastructure development, scientists say. Protecting forests is widely seen as one of the cheapest and most effective ways to reduce the emissions driving global warming.

But conservation efforts in DRC have suffered from a lack of precise data on which areas of the country's vast territory are most at risk of losing their pristine vegetation, said **Thomas Maschler**, a researcher at the World Resources Institute (WRI).

To address the problem Maschler and other scientists at the Washington-based WRI used a computer algorithm based on machine learning, a type of artificial intelligence.

The computer was fed inputs, including satellite derived data, detailing how the landscape in a number of regions, accounting for almost a fifth of the country, had changed between 2000 and 2014.

Information

The programme was asked to use the information to analyse links between deforestation and the factors driving it, such as proximity to roads or settlements, and to produce a detailed map forecasting future losses.

Overall the application predicted that woods covering an area roughly the size of Luxembourg would be cut down by 2025 — releasing 205 million metric tons of carbon dioxide (CO₂) into the atmosphere.

The study improved on earlier predictions that could only forecast average deforestation levels in DRC over large swathes of land, said Maschler.

The analysis will allow conservation groups to better decide where to focus their efforts and help the government shape its land use and climate change policy, said scientist Elizabeth Goldman who co-authored the research.

The DRC has pledged to restore 3 million hectares (11,583 square miles) of forest to reduce carbon emissions under the 2015 Paris Agreement, she said.

Also:

GUWAHATI, India: Indian government officials said they plan to build a 1,300 kms (800 mile) highway along the Brahmaputra River in the northeastern state of Assam to limit damage from annual floods, even as environmentalists said it would be ineffective.

The proposed six-lane highway will cost about 400 billion rupees (\$620 million), making it among the most expensive infrastructure projects in the state.

"The Brahmaputra Highway will serve the twin purpose of taming the annual floods and drastically improving connectivity in the region," said Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal.



This handout photo released by the European Southern Observatory on July 26, 2017 and taken with the wide field optical camera on ESO's VLT Survey Telescope (VST) shows the Orion Nebula and its associated cluster of young stars. (AFP)

Discovery

Probe sought into EPA chief: An ethics watchdog group filed a complaint asking for an investigation into Environmental Protection Agency Administrator **Scott Pruitt**'s frequent flights to his home state of Oklahoma at taxpayer expense.

The group American Oversight sent a letter Thursday to the US Office of Special Counsel asking for an investigation into whether Pruitt violated federal rules by using government resources to travel to Oklahoma for "personal or political reasons."

"The Trump administration is seeking to cut EPA's budget by 31%, putting Americans' health and safety at risk," American Oversight Executive Director Austin Evers, who was a lawyer for the State Department under president **Barack Obama**, said in a written statement. "At the same time, Pruitt is spending scarce taxpayer dollars to fuel his personal ambition for higher office."

Pruitt's expense reports from March, April and May were released following a Freedom of Information request filed by Environmental Integrity Project, a non-profit watchdog group. The records show Pruitt traveled home at least 10 times, typically leaving Washington on Fridays and returning on Mondays. Pruitt was either in Oklahoma or on trips that included stops there for nearly half the days encompassed in the three-month period, costing more than \$15,000. (AP)

Poland told to suspend logging: The European Union's top court has ordered Poland's right-wing government to suspend logging in the ancient Bialowieza forest pending a final judgement, a spokesman said Friday.

Bialowieza, straddling Poland's eastern border with Belarus, includes one of the largest surviving parts of the primeval forest that covered the European plain 10,000 years ago.

The UNESCO World Heritage site also boasts unique plant and animal life, including the continent's largest mammal, the European bison.

He added the order was "temporary" pending a final court ruling in the case, which could take months, possibly years.

The court was acting on a July 13 request by the European Commission, the

Climate

Warming to worsen dead zones

'I've given up on 'catastrophe' Trump'

LOS ANGELES, July 29. (Agencies): He once gave Donald Trump the benefit of the doubt, but mention the US president to Al Gore these days and you'll get a withering frown.

"He's a catastrophe, of course, but he has effectively isolated himself," the former US vice-president says, his nostrils dilating a few millimeters past scorn but stopping short of open contempt.

A decade after his documentary "An Inconvenient Truth" sent shockwaves around the world with its dire warnings of environmental disaster, Gore is sounding the alarm on climate change again.

"An Inconvenient Sequel: Truth to Power," released by Paramount on Friday, had its world premiere at the Sundance Film Festival a day before the Jan 20 inauguration.

Since then, the new US president has sent out a former CEO of oil giant ExxonMobil to represent America on the world stage and appointed an anti-climate litigator to run the Environmental Protection Agency.

He has moved to loosen restrictions on coal-fired power plants and vehicle emissions, slashed EPA funding, and reversed his predecessor Barack Obama's Clean Power Plan.

And then of course there was that announcement of withdrawal from the 196-nation 2016 Paris agreement on climate change.

"We're going to meet the US commitments regardless of what Donald Trump says," 69-year-old Gore tells AFP during an interview in Beverly Hills to promote his film.

"There's a law of physics that sometimes works in politics: for every action there's an equal and opposite reaction.

"It's as if the rest of the world is saying, 'We'll show you, Donald Trump. Now there is a progressive uprising to organize in ways I haven't seen since the Vietnam War.'"

In one of the most intriguing scenes towards the end of the 100-minute "An Inconvenient Sequel" Gore is seen heading for a meeting with the then president-elect at Trump Tower in New York.

He voiced cautious optimism at the time that the environmental movement might be able to do business with the incoming president, but Gore has since given up hope.

"Where he's concerned — absent some unforeseeable circumstances — I'm not going to waste any more time trying to convince him because he's surrounded himself with this rogue's gallery of climate deniers," Gore says.

"Even though I have protected the privacy of those conversations, I will tell you that I had reason to believe that there was a chance that he would come to his senses. But I was wrong."

Re-energized

"An Inconvenient Truth" (2006) re-energized the international environmental movement on its way to winning two Oscars and taking \$50 million at the box office.

Despite worries over the potential environmental damage of a Trump administration, the follow-up actually has a more hopeful message than its predecessor.

It follows Gore, who has trained an army of some 10,000 organizers to spread his environmental gospel, as he delivers rousing workshops around the world.

"There have been two huge changes since the last movie. Number one, the climate-related extreme weather events have become far more numerous and more destructive. That's true all over the world," Gore tells AFP.

Born in Washington, Gore shuttled between his home in Tennessee and a hotel in the capital while his father served in the House of Representatives and later in the Senate.

Gore would himself go on to serve

as a Congressman for three terms and was a two-time senator before becoming vice-president under Bill Clinton during one of the country's greatest economic booms.

Gore narrowly lost the presidential election to George W. Bush in 2000 and reinvented himself as a seer on climate change after his White House dreams were blown away, winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007.

His opponents over the years have accused him of being a fantasist and even a fraud, but he says his years in politics have given him a thick skin.

Gore describes himself as a "recovering politician," however, and is adamant that he has no plans for a comeback for the 2020 presidential election.

Also:

WASHINGTON: Projected increases in rain from global warming could further choke US waterways with fertilizer runoff that trigger dead zones and massive algae blooms, a new study said.

If greenhouse gas emissions keep rising, more and heavier rain will increase nitrogen flowing into lakes, rivers and bays by about 19 percent by the end of the century, according to a study in journal Science.

While that may not sound like much, many coastal areas are already heavily loaded with nitrogen. Researchers calculated that an extra 860,000 tons of nitrogen yearly will wash into American waterways by century's end.

The nutrients create low-oxygen dead zones and harmful blooms of algae in the **Gulf of Mexico**, Great Lakes, Pacific Northwest and Atlantic coast.

"Many of these coastal areas are already suffering year-in, year-out from these dead zones and algal blooms," said one of the researchers, **Anna Michalak**, an ecologist at the Carnegie Institution for Science at Stanford University. "And climate change will make it all worse."

28-nation EU executive, for "interim measures" to stop large-scale logging in "one of Europe's last remaining primeval forests." (AFP)

'Extinct' flower seen in Vermont: Botanists in Vermont say a flowering plant long thought to be extinct in the state is making a comeback.

Botanist Everett Marshall was hiking with his wife, Deb Parrella, in the Raven Ridge Natural Area in Monkton recently. She saw the small purple flowers of the native winged loosestrife while crossing a boardwalk through a wet meadow. A guidebook confirmed the identification.

The state says a small number of winged loosestrife plants were last ob-

served by a botanist in Middlebury in 1979. Before that, there were only eight records of the plant in Vermont, the most recent in 1933. (AP)



Pruitt



Gore

Arctic ice loss fuels warming: For much of the year, the Arctic appears as a crumpled white sheet of ice and snow before great chunks break off around the edges in spring, forming a sea of floes that gently dance across the frigid waters.

The floating ice slowly shrinks throughout summer until another winter season starts.

Because of global warming, more sea ice is being lost each summer than is being replenished in winters. Although sea ice is likely to continue forming each winter, it may be restricted to even higher latitudes.

Less sea ice coverage also means that less sunlight will be reflected off the surface of the ocean. The water will absorb more heat, further fueling global warming. (AP)