

## World News Roundup

## Environment

## Seals endangered

## Concrete weighs heavily on Mediterranean coast

NICOSIA, July 10, (AFP): Across the Mediterranean, from an illegally-built hotel in a Spanish nature park to a holiday complex encroaching on Lebanon's salt flats, a tourism boom is threatening precious coastal ecosystems.

With 46,000 kms (29,000 miles) of coastline spread across 21 countries, the Mediterranean hosts over a quarter of global tourism — but that comes at a cost to the planet.

"The current tourism model is highly unsustainable," says Plan Bleu, a UN-affiliated body for environment and development in the Mediterranean.

It estimates that arrivals have surged from 58 million in 1970 to 324 million in 2015, and could rise to 500 million by 2030.

The body has warned that future growth will exacerbate "already critical environmental pressures ... in coastal and marine ecosystems".

The region's population is also growing, surging from 32 million in 1970 to 75 million in 2000 on the Mediterranean's southern and eastern shores.

While legislation in some countries has improved coastal protection, abuses persist.

Spain's 8,000-km coastline has suffered multiple pressures, starting with a construction boom in the 1970s and another bubble ahead of the global property market crash in 2008.

A 21-storey hotel built against beachside hills in a protected nature park in Algarrobo is a symbol of illegal construction in the early 21st century.

Condemned to demolition by the Supreme Court, the 15-year-old hotel "remains standing because multiple lawsuits are underway", including to determine whether owner Azata del Sol should be compensated, Greenpeace Spain's **Pilar Marcos** told AFP.

In Lebanon, it's hard to go to the beach without paying private resort owners who control the coast.

## Illegally

In 2012, a Lebanese government report said about five million square metres of coastline is illegally built on.

Only 20 percent of the coastline is now freely accessible, says Jad Tabet, head of Lebanon's order of engineers.

Yet another new tourist complex in the northern Anfeh region has raised fears among environmentalists.

Called Natour Resort, it threatens one of the oldest salt flats in the Mediterranean in an archaeologically rich area that also boasts the "cleanest water on the Lebanese coast", says marine biologist Sammy Joe Lycha.

A 1986 "coastal law" in France protects around 15,000 kms of coastline in France and its overseas territories from urbanisation "despite land pressure", says Environment Minister Nicolas Hulot.

Lawmakers recently sought to review the legislation — provoking an outcry that forced them to retreat. But abuses have not stopped.

On the island of Corsica, environmental defence association "U Levante" has after 20 years won a court order to demolish a coastal villa built by a wealthy Swiss investor.

The Coastal Conservancy, a public body that encourages sustainable tourism, has protected 200,000 hectares (500,000 acres) of inland lakes and shoreline in mainland France.

It's a model Francisco Torres Alfosea, a geography professor at Alicante University, hopes Spain will adopt.

It's also the envy of environmentalists in Cyprus, who are campaigning against a development they say threatens sea caves that are home to endangered monk seals.

Meanwhile, in a string of caves along the coast of Cyprus, a colony of monk seals — the most endangered mammals in the Mediterranean — have found refuge.

But now environmentalists and residents are accusing developers of endangering the seals' habitat, by building luxury villas on top of the caves.

Numbering only around 300 in the Mediterranean, they were christened "monk seals" in the late eighteenth century by a scientist who thought they bore a resemblance to a monk dressed in a hood.

## Sanctuary

Most are found in Greek waters. But tucked under white rocks by the town of Peyia in southwest Cyprus, caves provide sanctuary to some of the seven to 10 monk seals found in Cypriot waters, according to the government.

Standing on a coastal path, Peyia resident Mandie Davies pointed to a construction site of six part-finished villas above the caves.

"It's a monstrosity," she told AFP.

One of the building projects is around 25 metres (yards) from the shore, lamented Peyia Mayor Marinos Lambrou — one of many here to oppose a government green light for the villas.

Monk seals are crucial "for the ecosystem's balance", said Melina Marcou, a government scientist who swims in the caves and monitors the creatures with hidden cameras.

But the seals' habitat is so sensitive Marcou urges the public to avoid the caves.

Their numbers diminished through centuries of being disturbed by fishermen, the mammals abandoned beaches over-exploited by humans.

More recently, urbanisation and tourism have been the key drivers of the seals' decline, said Marie-Aude Sevin, who works for the International Union for Conservation of Nature, an authority on monk seals and their numbers.

Cypriot law provides for a protection zone stretching 91 metres back from the shore, slightly less than the 100 metres recommended by the UN and EU.

But the Environment Ministry says even the government's own rule does not apply to the six villas — a position contested by scientists and ecologists.

A source close to the case told AFP the Environment Ministry approved the villas on the basis of outdated maps.

This meant it failed to take into account the effect of erosion, working on the basis that the plots are further from the shore than in reality, the source added.

Another expert, Klitos Papastylianou from the Initiative for the Protection of the Natural Coastline, alleged that there was no adequate environmental impact study during the planning process, contravening an EU directive.

For Linda Leblanc, a municipal councillor in Peyia, the villas are a "terrible testament to the failure" of the government's environmental policy.

The area only became eligible for construction after a decree signed by a former interior minister, 10 days before a 2008 presidential election and the end of his tenure, according to multiple sources.

The decree and construction on Peyia's coast are still under scrutiny by parliament.



Marcos



Tourists walk along part of the Sea Caves near the town of Pegeia in western Cyprus on May 9. In a string of caves along the coast of Cyprus, a colony of monk seals — the most endangered mammals in the Mediterranean, numbering only around 300 — have found refuge. But now environmentalists and residents are accusing developers of endangering their habitat by building luxury villas on top of the caves. (AFP)



Handout picture released by Agencia CTyS (Science, Technology and Society divulgation agency) on July 9, shows an Argentine investigator working on the extraction of the remains of a giant dinosaur from the Balde de Leyes formation, near Marayes, San Juan province, Argentina. (AFP)



This handout photo taken on July 9 shows a large saltwater crocodile weighing 600 kilograms (1,328 pounds) in a trap after being caught after an eight-year hunt, in the Northern Territory town of Katherine. (AFP)

## Discovery

**'Krill' restricted in Antarctica:** Five major krill fishing firms Tuesday agreed to halt operations across huge swathes of the Antarctic to help protect wildlife in a move hailed as "bold and progressive" by conservationists.

The vast frozen continent is home to penguins, seals, whales and other marine life with krill a staple food for many species.

But a combination of climate change and industrial-scale fishing has been hitting populations of the small crustacean, with potentially disastrous impacts on larger predators.

Now the five companies that make up the Association of Responsible Krill Harvesting (ARK) — from Norway, Chile, South Korea and China — have agreed to stop fishing in sensitive coastal areas. They also threw their support behind a planned network of marine protected areas (MPAs) throughout the Southern Ocean, including in places where they currently operate.

The shrimp-like crustacean, which is rich in protein, is primarily used in the aquaculture industry although its oil is a popular nutritional supplement.

ARK represent 85 percent of the Antarctic krill fishing industry and conservationists said it was a significant move.

"This is a bold and progressive response from these krill fishing companies, and we hope to see the remainder of the krill industry follow suit," said Greenpeace spokesman **Phil Vine**. (AFP)

**Aussie monster croc caught:** An elusive monster saltwater crocodile weighing 600 kgs (1,328 pounds) has finally been caught after an eight-year hunt in Australia, officials said on Tuesday.

The 4.7-metre (15.4-foot) beast was found in a trap downstream from the northern outback town of Katherine after first being spotted in 2010.

Authorities had tried in vain for years to bag the croc, which is estimated to be 60 years old.

"We've called it a lot of things over the

## Space

## Russian ship docks at ISS

## Planet hunter forced to nap

WASHINGTON, July 10, (Agencies): NASA's Kepler Space Telescope is almost out of fuel and has been forced to take a nap.

Flight controllers placed the planet-hunting spacecraft into hibernation last week to save energy. It will remain asleep until early August, when controllers attempt to send down the data collected before observations were interrupted.

Kepler has been searching for planets outside our solar system for nearly a decade. Considered the pioneer of planet hunting, it's discovered nearly 3,000 confirmed worlds and as many potential candidates.

Launched in 2009, Kepler has endured mechanical failures and other mishaps.

But there's no getting around an empty fuel tank. The fuel is needed for pointing the telescope.

Kepler's antenna must be pointed toward Earth to get the most recent observations back. For now, that's the team's highest priority.

A Russian cargo ship delivered a fresh load of fuel, food, and other supplies for the International Space Station on Tuesday, making it in record time.

The Progress MS-09 lifted off as scheduled at 3:51 am (21:51 GMT; 5:51 pm EDT Monday) from the Russia-leased Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan. The unmanned space-

craft loaded with nearly three tons of supplies docked at the station in automatic mode less than four hours after the launch.

It marked the first time such a fast-track approach was used. In the past, it took the Progress ships up to two days to reach the space outpost.

Russia's space agency Roscosmos said the faster maneuver became possible thanks to a new version of the Soyuz booster rocket, noting that it puts the ship into orbit with higher precision.

NASA said that the fast trip to the station was intended to test an expedited capability that could be used on future Russian cargo and crew launch missions.

An Israeli organisation announced plans Tuesday to launch the country's first spacecraft to the moon in December, with hopes of burnishing Israel's reputation as a small nation with otherworldly high-tech ambitions.

The unmanned spacecraft, shaped like a pod and weighing some 585 kilograms (1,300 pounds) at launch, will land on the moon on Feb 13, 2019 if all goes according to plan, organisers SpaceIL told a news conference in Yehud, central Israel.

The vessel will be launched via a rocket from American entrepreneur **Elon Musk's** SpaceX firm and its mission will include research on the moon's magnetic field.

When **J. Robert Oppenheimer** invited top scientists, engineers and technicians to New Mexico in 1943 to build the world's first nuclear weapon, no one really knew what the results would be.

What they did know was that they had to succeed at all costs since intelligence reports indicated Germany and its allies were working toward the same goal.

The once-secret city of Los Alamos is marking 75 years of discovery at Los Alamos National Laboratory, which still plays a key role in maintaining the United States' nuclear weapons cache.

The facility also still conducts research on everything from renewable energy technology to public health concerns and the effects of insects on stressed forests. (AP)

**N. Mexico N-arms lab turns 75:**

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**Vine**

**Oppenheimer**

## Archaeology

## Dino bones found

## Extract of Homer's Odyssey discovered

ATHENS, July 10, (Agencies): Archaeologists in Greece have discovered what they believe to be the oldest known extract of Homer's epic poem "The Odyssey".

A team of Greek and German researchers found it on an engraved clay plaque in Ancient Olympia, the birthplace of the Olympic Games in the Peloponnese peninsula, the Greek culture ministry said on Tuesday.

It holds 13 verses from the Odyssey's 14th Rhapsody, where its hero, Odysseus, addresses his lifelong friend Eumaeus. Preliminary estimates date the finding to the Roman era, probably before the 3rd century AD.

The date still needed to be confirmed, but the plaque was still "a great archaeological, epigraphic, literary and historical exhibit," the ministry said.

The Odyssey, 12,109 lines of poetry attributed to the ancient Greek poet Homer, tells the story of Odysseus, king of Ithaca, who wanders for 10 years trying to get home after the fall of Troy.

The Odyssey is the second major poem attributed to Homer after the "Iliad" and scholars date its writing to around 675-725 BCE. It is widely considered to be among the world's greatest works of literature.

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## Bones fuels 'Triassic' rethink:

Giant dinosaurs lived on Earth much earlier than previously thought, according to a team of excavators in Argentina who discovered the remains of a 200-million-year old species.

The species, baptized Ingenia prima, was about three times the size of the largest Triassic dinosaurs from its era. It was discovered in the Balde de Leyes dig site in San Juan province, 1,100 kms (680 miles) west of the Argentine capital Buenos Aires.

The find was published in the specialist Nature Ecology & Evolution journal on Monday and revealed in Argentina by the La Matanza National University's Scientific Dissemination Agency.

"As soon as we found it, we realized it was something different. We found a shape, the first giant one among all the dinosaurs. That's the surprise," said **Cecilia Apaldetti**, a government and San Juan University researcher.

Excavators found several vertebrae from the neck and tail as well as fore and hind leg bones.

The species "exhibits a growth strategy that was unknown until now and indicates that gigantism originated much earlier than was thought," said Apaldetti, the study's co-author.

These were "herbivore dinosaurs, quadrupeds, easily recognizable by their very long neck and tail, and from the sauropod group," she added.

Before this discovery, it was thought that gigantism developed during the Jurassic period, around 180 million years ago.

Fellow co-author Ricardo Martinez believes the Ingenia prima is from "a Late Triassic period, possibly 205 million years ago."

The Triassic period extended from around 250-200 million years ago and the Jurassic from 200-145 million years ago.

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## Oldest biological colours:

Australian researchers have uncovered the world's oldest biological colour in the Sahara desert, in a find they said Tuesday helped explain why complex lifeforms only recently emerged on earth.

The pink pigments were produced by simple microscopic organisms called cyanobacteria more than 1.1 billion years ago, some 500 million years older than previous colour pigment discoveries.

That makes the samples around "fifteen times older" than the Tyrannosaurus Rex dinosaur species, according to senior Australian National University researcher Jochen Brocks.

Earth itself is about 4.5 billion years old and researchers said the latest find shed light on why more sophisticated plant and animal life only came into existence 600 million years ago.

Previous research argued that low oxygen levels in the atmosphere held back the evolution of complicated lifeforms, but the discovery of cyanobacteria at such an early date suggests that the organisms crowded out more plentiful food sources such as algae.

"Algae, although still microscopic, are a thousand times larger in volume than cyanobacteria, and are a much richer food source," Brocks told AFP.

"The cyanobacterial oceans started to vanish about 650 million years ago, when algae began to rapidly spread to provide the burst of energy needed for the evolution of complex ecosystems, where large animals, including humans, could thrive on Earth."



Apaldetti