

World News Roundup



A column of volcanic smoke rises from the crater on the Shinmoedake volcano after its eruption in Kirishima, southern Japan on March 6. The volcano erupted violently several times Tuesday, shooting up ash and smoke up to 2,300 meters (7,500 feet) in its biggest explosion since 2011, the Meteorological Agency said. (AP)

Japanese volcano erupts, dozens of flights grounded

A volcano in southern Japan that appeared in a James Bond film had its biggest eruption in years Tuesday, shooting smoke and ash thousands of meters (feet) into the sky and grounding dozens of flights at a nearby airport, officials said. The Meteorological Agency said the Shinmoedake volcano on Japan's southernmost main

island of Kyushu erupted violently several times, and some lava was rising inside a crater.

Public broadcaster NHK showed gray volcanic smoke billowing into the sky and orange lava rising to the mouth of the crater. The Meteorological Agency said ash and smoke shot up 2,300 meters (7,500 feet) into

the sky in the volcano's biggest explosion since 2011.

In Kirishima city at the foot of the volcano, pedestrians wore surgical masks or covered their noses with hand towels, while others used umbrellas to protect from falling ash. Cars had layers of ash on their roofs.

There were no reports of injuries or damage from

the eruptions. The agency said the volcanic activity is expected to continue and cautioned residents against the possibility of flying rocks and pyroclastic flows — superheated gas and volcanic debris that race down the slopes at high speeds, incinerating or vaporizing everything in their path. (AP)

Pollution

Laundry room at a time

Innovators take on microfiber pollution

PORTLAND, Maine, March 6, (AP): The fight to keep tiny pollutants from reaching the dinner plate might start in the laundry room.

Innovators are coming up with tools to keep tiny pieces of thread that are discharged with washing machine effluent from reaching marine life. Such "microfibers" are too small to be caught in conventional filters, so they eventually pass through sewage plants, wash out to waterways, and can be eaten or absorbed by marine animals, some later served up as seafood.

So far there are at least four products, with names such as Guppyfriend and Cora Ball, aimed at curbing microfibers.

The developers are taking the war on pollution to a microscopic level after the fight against microbeads — tiny plastic beads found in some beauty products that were banned nationally in 2015.

"Blaming industry or government won't solve the problems," said Alexander Nolte, co-founder of Guppyfriend, a polyamide washing bag designed to prevent tiny threads from escaping. "Buy less and better; wash less and better."

The issue has become an increasing focus of environmental scientists seeking to find out just how harmful microfibers are to coastal ecosystems, oceans and marine life and whether they affect human health. One study from 2011, led by Australian ecotoxicologist Mark Browne, found that microfibers made up 85 percent of man-caused shoreline debris.

Exactly how much microfiber pollution exists in the environment is a subject of research and debate. The United Nations has identified microfiber pollution as a key outgrowth of the 300 million tons of plastic produced annually. And a 2016 study in the journal Environmental Science & Technology found that more than a gram of microfibers is released every time synthetic jackets are washed 7/8 — and that as much as 40 percent of those microfibers eventually enter waterways.

While there's no question microfibers are escaping into the environment, it's unclear how harmful they are, said Chelsea Rochman, an ecology professor at the University of Toronto who plans a study at the end of the year.

One of the questions, she said, is whether the problem is the fibers themselves or dyes in them, and whether natural microfibers such as wool and cotton are less harmful than plastic microfibers.

The microfiber trappers take various forms. Guppyfriend, the laundry bag, is sold by clothing company Patagonia for \$29.75. Cora Ball retails at \$29.99 and is a multicolored ball designed to bounce around the washing machine, trapping microfibers in appendages that resemble coral. Lint LUV-R costs \$140 or more and is a filter that attaches to a laundry water discharge hose.

While the US Census has found more than 85 percent of US households have a washing machine, the items are new to the market and not familiar to most consumers. About 50,000 households use the Guppyfriend bag, Nolte said, and it might be the best known of the bunch.



UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres (right), shakes hands with Michael Bloomberg as he is appointed Special Envoy for Climate Action at the United Nations headquarters on March 5 in New York. (AFP)



Musk



Outhwaite

Discovery

50th launch of Falcon 9: SpaceX carried out the 50th launch of its signature Falcon 9 rocket early Tuesday, a swift ascent to a milestone which many aerospace giants take far longer to attain.

The launch of the Falcon 9 carrying a Hispasat Spanish-language telecommunications and broadband satellite took place on schedule at 12:33 am (0533 GMT) from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station in Florida.

About 33 minutes into the flight, the satellite was deployed into geo-stationary orbit, SpaceX said in a webcast. The satellite weighs six tonnes and is almost the size of a city bus, making it the largest geostationary satellite that SpaceX has taken into space.

The satellite aims to expand television, broadband and telecommunications service in Europe and Northwest Africa.

The Falcon 9 first flew in 2010, and since then has become the California-based company's workhorse for sending supplies to the International Space Station, as well as launching both commercial satellites and secretive government payloads.

Elon Musk's grand visions for space exploration include sending tourists into orbit around the Moon and eventually colonizing Mars. (AFP)

More protected species shifted: Shipments of protected African species including tortoises, pythons and parrots to Asia have soared since 2006 as demand grows in the Far East for exotic pets, meats and other animal products, a new study warned Tuesday.

Wildlife imports of leopard tortoises, African spurred tortoises and ball pythons into Asia increased nearly tenfold in a decade, the report by monitoring network Traffic said, while trade in animal skins including seals also rose.

"Until now the legal wildlife trade

Climate

'Trump will be great'

Bloomberg 'climate' envoy

UNITED NATIONS, March 6, (AP): The UN's new envoy for climate action, former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, said Monday that President Donald Trump can become "a great leader" if he changes his mind about global warming and keeps the United States in the Paris climate agreement.

The billionaire media mogul expressed hope that Trump will listen to his advisers, look at the data on climate change, and support the 2015 Paris accord aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Bloomberg spoke during a ceremony at which UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres gave him the new title of UN special envoy for climate action, handing him the job of spurring international action to help curb global warming.

A longtime activist for clean energy and a green economy, Bloomberg was appointed UN special envoy on cities and climate change by then UN chief Ban Ki-moon in January 2014. Since then, he has been traveling around the United States and the world campaigning for a reduction in carbon emissions.

Guterres announced that Bloomberg will help support a UN Climate Summit that he is planning at UN headquarters in 2019 to mobilize more ambitious action and start implementing the Paris climate agree-

ment now.

Countries agreed in the Paris accord to limit global warming to 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) and do their best to keep it below 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit), compared with pre-industrial times. But the agreement starts after 2020 — and at UN climate talks in November over 170 countries stressed the importance of implementing ambitious climate actions before 2020.

Trump announced last June that he was withdrawing the US from the Paris agreement, fulfilling a campaign pledge to quit the world's chief effort to slow planetary warming.

He framed his decision as "a re-assertion of America's sovereignty" and argued that the agreement had disadvantaged the US "to the exclusive benefit of other countries," leaving American businesses and taxpayers to absorb the cost.

Under terms of the agreement, the US cannot officially pull out until 2020.

Bloomberg has urged world leaders not to follow Trump, and has pledged to save the Paris agreement.

Last October, for example, his foundation donated \$64 million to a Sierra Club program seeking to phase out coal-fired power plants and reduce planet-warming carbon emissions.

between Africa and Asia has been largely overlooked," said Willow Outhwaite, co-author of the "Eastward Bound" study, adding that the report aims to "fill in some

of the blanks in our understanding of this vast, complex" trade. (CITES). (AFP)



A SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket lifts off early morning on March 6, from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, Florida. The rocket is carrying the Hispasat 30W-6 communications satellite. (AP)

Hayhoe makes case: Katharine Hayhoe, a climate scientist and evangelical Christian, says she gets slammed every day on social media for her contributions to establishing that climate change is human-made.

But on Monday, she was welcomed with applause at a United Nations-backed climate

summit in the capital of Canada's western province of Alberta, where polls show that climate skepticism rates are among the highest in the country.

Hayhoe, a professor at Texas Tech University, has emerged in recent years as a leading voice sharing the science

of climate change to skeptics — many of whom are fellow evangelical churchgoers.

A 2015 survey from the Washington DC-based Pew Research Center found that just one quarter of white evangelicals in the United States believe that climate change is caused by humans. (RTRS)

Monarch butterfly numbers off: The number of monarch butterflies wintering in Mexican forests declined for a second consecutive year, a government official said Monday.

Alejandro Del Mazo, Mexico's commissioner for protected areas, said the monarchs clumped in trees covering about 6.12 acres (2.48 hectares) this winter. That was down about 14.7 percent from the 7.19 acres (2.91 hectares) the previous winter.

The monarch butterflies' migration is measured by the area they cover in pine and fir forests west of Mexico City. Millions of the butterflies make the 3,400-mile (5,500-km) migration from the United States and Canada each year. (AP)

NZ heatwave sets record: New Zealand has sweltered through its hottest summer on record and can expect more of the same if climate change continues unabated, the government's scientific agency said Tuesday.

Daily temperatures averaged 18.8 Celsius (65.84 Fahrenheit), 2.1C more than normal, the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA) said.

With the mercury reaching as high as 38.7C in the South Island, NIWA said it was the hottest summer since records began in 1909, surpassing the previous high set in 1934-35.

NIWA's chief forecaster Chris Brandolino said a number of factors were behind the warm weather, including a spike in marine temperatures and warm northerly winds from a La Nina weather pattern. (AFP)

5 types of apples, rediscovered: Five types of apples, once thought to be extinct, have been rediscovered in northern Idaho and eastern Washington.

The Lewiston Tribune newspaper reported Monday that "apple detective" David Benscoter located the trees growing near a butte in the rolling hills of the vast Palouse agricultural area.

Benscoter worked with apple experts at the Temperate Orchard Conservancy in Oregon and Fedco Seeds in Maine to positively identify the apple types. They were compared to written descriptions from old books and antique watercolor paintings. (AP)