

World News Roundup

Climate

DiCaprio backs initiative

Preparedness may slash heatwave toll in Europe

BARCELONA, July 3, (RTRS): The impact of June's extreme heat across France, Spain and other parts of Europe is likely to have been less damaging than in the past because governments put in place measures to cope after a deadly 2003 heatwave, scientists said Tuesday.

Governments were spurred into action by a European heatwave that year that caused the deaths of more than 35,000 people, and are now better prepared to keep their citizens safe, according to climate scientists at the World Weather Attribution group.

The international partnership analyses the possible influence of climate change on extreme weather events, from floods to droughts.

The scientists on Tuesday released a rapid assessment of three days of scorching heat in France from June 26-28, saying climate change made the event five times more likely and had boosted the temperature of the heatwave by about 4°C (7.2°F).

The death toll linked to health effects from the recent heatwave will not be known for a few weeks, they said.

But Geert Jan van Oldenborgh, a senior researcher with the Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute, said heat action plans developed by governments had been shown to decrease mortality "substantially".

"We hope that this heatwave has become much less deadly than the 2003 heatwave because of the adaptation measures that have been taken," he told journalists.

Those measures – put in place from Paris to Barcelona – included handing out water at train stations and in other public places, asking people to check on elderly neighbours and relatives, and opening air-conditioned schools, libraries and other "cool shelters" for city residents.

Extreme

Robert Vautard, a senior scientist at France's National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), noted the recent heatwave was most extreme in southern France, where housing and social systems are already more adapted to extreme heat.

Temperatures in the southern Gard region hit an all-time high of 45.9°C (114.62°F) last Friday – hotter than in California's Death Valley – sparking fires that burned 550 hectares of land.

But the temperature in the city of Paris remained relatively "reasonable" at about 35°C or 36°C, which was lower than in 2003, reducing the negative consequences, Vautard added.

Friederike Otto, acting director of the Environmental Change Institute at Britain's University of Oxford, said research on a 2006 heatwave in Europe showed the 2003 wake-up call had led to fewer deaths as authorities brought in preventive measures.

During the July 2006 heatwave, about 2,065 deaths occurred above the normal death rate in France, which was about 4,400 less than expected based on the 2003 episode, a 2008 study said.

This week's rapid assessment said post-2003 heat plans had been activated for this June's heatwave and had probably helped ease the impacts.

Accurate forecasts by the national weather service, Météo-France, also gave early warning, it said.

For example, the all-time national temperature record temperature was correctly forecast to within 1°C, and the prediction came at least three days in advance.

Scientists decided to analyse the impact of the June heatwave in part because it came at a time of year when the French population is still at work and at school before the summer holidays, potentially making people more vulnerable.

The elderly and children are especially at risk in heatwaves.

The French government decided to postpone one national exam because of the heat, despite the huge organisational challenges involved, the researchers noted.

They examined the daily mean temperature – 27.5°C across France over the three days – rather than the maximum or minimum temperature because it is a better indicator of health impacts, they said.

Multi-day heatwaves have proportionally larger health effects, and three days is a length that captures those impacts reasonably well, they noted.

The scientists warned that heat extremes are likely to rise as climate change warms the planet on a trajectory expected to exceed limits set by governments in a 2015 Paris climate accord.

Global average temperatures have already risen by 1°C, and are on track to become at least 3°C hotter than in pre-industrial times, scientists have said.

If the world hits 2°C of warming and heatwaves follow their current trends, "a heatwave like this will be the norm in June", warned Jan van Oldenborgh.

Also:

LOS ANGELES: Earth Alliance, an organization to combat climate change and biodiversity loss, launched Tuesday with founding co-chairs actor **Leonardo DiCaprio**, businesswoman and philanthropist **Laurene Powell Jobs** and investor and philanthropist **Brian Sheth**.

The Earth Alliance pools the resources of the Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation (founded by DiCaprio), Emerson Collective (founded by Powell Jobs) and Global Wildlife Conservation (chaired by Sheth). According to a press release, an independent management team of scientists and conservationists will lead the Alliance in its efforts to protect ecosystems and wildlife, ensure climate justice, support renewable energy and secure indigenous rights.

"I am incredibly proud of the impact my foundation has had over the last 20 years by supporting nearly 200 projects from 132 different organizations across climate science, marine and land conservation, critical species preservation and indigenous rights," said DiCaprio.

"Today marks the next step in the evolution of LDF as it fully merges under the new Earth Alliance management and grant-making framework. Laurene and Brian are incredible civic leaders who share my passion and understanding of the urgency and scale of the challenges we face. I am proud to partner with them to form this new larger, nimble platform that shares resources and expertise while identifying the best programs to drive real change around the planet."

Earth Alliance will provide grants and educational opportunities, engage indigenous and local communities and work with grassroots organizations and individuals in the places most affected by biodiversity loss and climate change. Additionally, the Alliance will fund campaigns, documentary films, third-party independent environmental reporting and public speaking opportunities.



A man stands under a total solar eclipse in La Higuera, Chile on July 2. Northern Chile is known for clear skies and some of the largest, most powerful telescopes on Earth are being built in the area, turning the South American country into a global astronomy hub. (AP)

Astronomy

Thousands gather to witness cosmic spectacle

Chileans, Argentines gape at total eclipse

LA SERENA, Chile, July 3, (AP): Tens of thousands of tourists and locals gaped skyward Tuesday as a total eclipse of the sun darkened the heavens over Chile and Argentina.

Tourists from around the world gathered to witness the cosmic spectacle, which began in the morning as the moon crossed in front of the sun and cast a shadow that passed over a tiny uninhabited atoll in the South Pacific and headed to South America. Chile and Argentina were the only inhabited places where the total eclipse could be seen.

The eclipse made its first landfall in Chile at 3:22 pm (1922 GMT) in La Serena, a city of some 200,000 people where the arrival of more than 300,000 visitors forced the local water company to increase output and service gas stations to store extra fuel. Police and health services were also reinforced.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" thousands of spectators shouted as they jumped and danced without taking their eyes off the sky. After a brief moment of silence, the yelling returned as the sun's rays began reaching Earth again.

Others shouted "Long live, Chile!" – a chant used at sporting events. In northern Chile, meteorologists measured a three-degree Centigrade drop in temperature and in the center a two-degree drop.

"Today Chile is the world capital of astronomy," said Chilean President Sebastián Piñera, alluding to the

dozens of giant observatories in the country, which amount to about half the world's telescopic capacity. "We are the eyes and senses of humanity to be able to look, observe and study the stars and the universe."

In the Argentine town of Chascomús, dozens braved near-freezing temperatures and strong winds and claimed a spot at a pier in a lagoon, hoping to catch a glimpse of the eclipse.

"I've been looking at the sky since my youth. My first telescope when I was a kid was made out of cardboard," said Ricardo Rumie, a 68-year-old veteran eclipse-watcher, who set up his camera with a tripod and a telescope with a sun filter along the banks of the lagoon.

Eclipses

"I've seen other eclipses but never like this one. I just couldn't miss it. For me it's something supreme."

Yoga teacher Cecilia Magnicaballi searched for the best spot to watch the eclipse with a green mat under her arm.

"This is about taking out the darkness, letting the sun, the light come in," she said.

Some rushed to buy the cardboard-framed protective eyeglasses at the last minute.

"This is something that they say won't repeat itself for like 300 years, so we wanted to bring our son," said Maximiliano Giannobile, who arrived at the pier with 18-month-old Vitto

wrapped in a puffy jacket and several layers of clothes.

Northern Chile is known for clear skies and some of the largest, most powerful telescopes on Earth are being built in the area.

"In the past 50 years we've only had two eclipses going over observatories. So when it happens and an observatory lies in the path of a totality, it really is special for us," said Elyar Sedaghati, an astronomer working as a fellow at the European Southern Observatory in Paranal, Chile.

"We can finally use our toys during the day because it's always at night that we use them."

The town of La Higuera was also plunged into total darkness.

"We hope this milestone will transform (our town) into a tourist attraction, so that visitors ... can come to La Higuera and take a picture where there once was a total sun eclipse," Mayor Yerko Galleguillos said.

Town officials distributed more than 2,000 cardboard-frame protective eyeglasses at local schools and community centers while workers built statues of huge sunglasses and a darkened sun on a local square.

A solar eclipse occurs when the moon passes between the Earth and the sun and scores a bull's-eye by completely blocking out the sunlight.

Thousands of visitors also trekked to neighboring areas of Argentina where the eclipse also will be total.



A NASA Orion spacecraft lifts off from pad 46 at the Cape Canaveral Air Force Station on July 2 in Cape Canaveral, Fla. This launch is for a test of the capsule's launch abort system (LAS), which is a rocket-powered tower on top of the crew module built to very quickly get astronauts safely away from their launch vehicle if there is a problem during ascent. (AP)



Didier

Macron

Discovery

'Old City' joins Risk List: The World Heritage Committee of the UNESCO has adopted a resolution affirming the status of the Old City in Jerusalem on the World Heritage at Risk List, Jordanian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Sufian Al-Qudhat said Tuesday.

The decision came as a result of intensive Jordanian diplomatic efforts in coordination between Jordan and Palestine and the Arab and Islamic groups in the organization, the spokesperson said in a statement.

He noted that the resolution affirms the previous gains that were confirmed in the Jerusalem file and on all elements of the Jerusalem and its walls, including the Islamic and Christian holy sites, and the rejection of the unilateral Israeli violations and actions in these historic places.

The resolution calls on Israel to stop its violations and unilateral and illegal measures against Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Old City of Jerusalem and its walls and affirm the nullity of all Israeli measures aimed at changing the character and identity of the Holy City, he added. (KUNA)

France returns ancient artifacts.

France returned more than 400 stolen artifacts to the government of Pakistan on Tuesday, including ancient busts, vases, urns and goblets, some dating to the second and third millennia B.C.

Many of the pieces turned up in France in September 2006, sent in parcels addressed to a gallery in Paris.

The packages were intercepted by customs officers at Roissy Charles de Gaulle airport and identified by the National Centre for Scientific Research as items looted from

cemeteries in Pakistan's Indus Valley.

Another consignment of pottery and terracotta pieces destined for the same gallery was stopped two weeks later. And during a search of the unnamed gallery's premises, customs officers seized several hundred more ceramic pieces.

In a ceremony held at Pakistan's embassy in Paris, 445 artifacts were handed back to Pakistan on Tuesday, with an estimated value of 139,000 euros (\$157,000).

"It is indeed a special moment for Pakistan," said Muhammad Majad Aziz Qazi, the head of mission. "It is also an emotional moment for us. We believe, today, that a part of Pakistan's heritage is coming back to its homeland."

Qazi said arrangements were being made to send the treasures back to Islamabad as soon as possible.

Aurora Didier, a specialist in South Asian archaeology, said Baluchistan in



A polar fox is fitted with a satellite tracking collar in Krossfjorden, Svalbard, a Norwegian Arctic archipelago, on July 29, 2017, as part of research conducted by the Norwegian Polar Institute. Norwegian researchers saw on July 2, 2019, that the young female arctic fox, shown in this photo, has been tracked walking from northern Norway to Canada's far north, a distance of 4,415 kilometers (2,737 miles), via Greenland in 4 months. (AP)

southern Pakistan had suffered widespread theft of ancient artifacts, making it ever harder to gather anthropological data on the peoples who once lived there.

"It was not only greedy smugglers that encouraged it but the international art market as well," she said. "These lootings used to be prevalent in this region of Baluchistan."

French President Emmanuel Macron has made a point of seeking to return ancient artworks to regions where they originated. (RTRS)

2,737 miles walk in 4 days: An arctic fox walked more than 4,415 kilometers (2,737 miles) to go from northern Norway to Canada's far north in four months, Norwegian researchers said.

The Norwegian Polar Institute reported the young female fox left her birth place on Norway's Svalbard archipelago on March 1, 2018 and reached Canada's Ellesmere Island by way of Greenland on July 1, 2018.

The ground the small fox cumulatively covered over those four months was among the most ever recorded for an arctic fox seeking a place to settle down and breed, the institute said in a research article subtitled "One female's long run across sea ice."

Institute scientists monitored the fox's movements with a satellite tracking device they fitted her with in July 2017 near her native habitat by a glacier on Norway's Spitsbergen island.

She stayed close to home then gradually ventured out until she left the island on March 26, 2018. (AP)