



SRI LANKA: In this photo, a Sri Lankan small scale fisherman casts a net as he fishes in a lagoon surrounded by mangrove forests in Pambala, about 70 kilometers north of Colombo, Sri Lanka. — AP

SRI LANKA TO CONSERVE CLIMATE FRIENDLY MANGROVES ECOSYSTEM

‘THE TOURISM INDUSTRY LEARNED A BITTER LESSON FROM THE TSUNAMI’

PAMBALA LAGOON, Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka's government and environmentalists are working to protect tens of thousands of acres of mangrove forests - the seawater-tolerant trees that help protect and build landmasses, absorb carbon from the environment and reduce the impact of natural disasters like tsunamis. All 37,000 acres of mangrove forests in Sri Lanka are now earmarked for preservation. Researchers say at least 6,000 acres were previously destroyed, mostly in the last 25 years. Mangroves were cleared to

are 22 species of mangroves in Sri Lanka, a third of all mangrove species found around the world. They grow in brackish water estuaries which are not favorable for other plants to grow, and create many environmental and health benefits: Their above-ground roots, mostly submerged in the water, produce food for small fish, crabs and shrimp and serve as a haven for breeding. Small-scale lagoon fishers have benefited from the ecosystem for generations. Their roots can accumulate soil particles and build landmasses while

bon in the soil. Medical researchers have isolated from 15 mangrove species anti-cancer compounds that have been shown to fight breast and liver cancer cells.

Win-win situation

Dr Sameera Samarakoon, who was part of research by the University of Colombo, says these findings are being studied further. Seacology, a US-based nongovernmental organization, last year launched a \$3.4 million, five-year mangrove conservation and replanting program with the Sri Lankan government. A museum funded by the group opened in Pambala yesterday, World Mangrove Day, to exhibit mangroves, fish and crab species bred in the lagoons, with facilities for study and research. The Small Fishers' Federation, Seacology's Sri Lankan partner, is running a nursery near Pambala Lagoon, some 65 kilometers north of the capital, Colombo, to produce 500,000 seedlings for replanting.

One thousand acres of mangroves are expected to be replanted by the end of this year. The project plans to rope in 15,000 persons, mostly the unemployed from around the lagoons, to protect mangrove plantations in return for microloans to set up small businesses. "By offering training and funding to develop alternatives to cutting mangroves, the project's livelihoods program is alleviating poverty as well as protecting mangroves," said Duane Silverstein, Seacology's executive director. "It's a win-win situation."

Anuradha Wickramasinghe, head of the fishers' federation, says he first felt the importance of protecting mangroves in the 1990s, when mangrove forests were being fast destroyed by shrimp farmers. That sent fishermen's fish and crab catch into decline. Sri Lanka's tourism industry is expanding along the coastline, creating the possibility for conflict, though the government intends to promote ecotourism in mangrove areas. Srilal Mittalalapa, of the Sri Lanka Hoteliers' Association, says the industry hopes the project will have a balance between conservation and development. "The tourism industry learned a bitter lesson from the tsunami and we understand the importance of the mangroves," Mittalalapa said. — AP



SRI LANKA: In this photo, an isolated mangrove plant is seen in a lagoon in Kalpitiya, about 130 kilometers north of Colombo, Sri Lanka. — AP

make room for shrimp farming, to produce salt or to make firewood. Government forces destroyed forests during the country's nearly 26-year civil war, which raged until 2009, because rebel fighters used them as hideouts.

Now the South Asian island nation is showing an interest in retaining what is left. President Maithripala Sirisena, who took office last year, has retained the environment portfolio and has shown a personal interest in the project. There

also acting as a buffer against coastal erosion.

In the 2004 Asian tsunami that killed more than 35,000 Sri Lankans, areas covered by mangrove forests suffered less damage as the trees absorbed some of the energy of the waves. The trees absorb carbon dioxide more efficiently than other plants.

Forests typically release carbon dioxide into the atmosphere as plant matter decomposes, but because mangrove habitat is much wetter, there is less oxygen activity, leaving more car-

of five-about 30 percent of the global total, a WaterAid report said.

Stunting is a form of malnutrition in which children are shorter than normal for their age and is largely irreversible after the age of two. If they survive, they grow up physically and intellectually weaker than their better-fed peers. WaterAid says a lack of toilets and clean water

are causing high levels of stunting in India. That is because high rates of open defecation lead to contamination that can spread disease and infection. Data collated by WaterAid showed that 140,000 children die every year from diarrhea in India, while 76 million do not have access to safe water and 774 million live without adequate sanitation.

"India has the highest number of people in the world... practicing open defecation, which spreads deadly diseases and makes children more susceptible to diarrhea and other infections," said Megan Wilson-Jones, WaterAid health and hygiene analyst. "So it is no surprise that so many children in India suffer from stunted growth," she added.

Open defecation has long been a major health and sanitation problem in India, where almost 594 million people-nearly half the population-defecate in the open, according to UNICEF. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has stressed the need to clean up India since storming to power in 2014 and has repeatedly urged every household to have a toilet within four years to end the spread of disease. Nigeria ranked second with 10.3 million stunted children while Pakistan stood third in WaterAid's study with 9.9 million.

Impoverished Bangladesh fared better than its bigger, wealthier neighbor India, recording 5.5 million cases in its 160 million-strong population. The country has almost eliminated open defecation in just over a decade through a concerted campaign to build toilets. East Timor was the country where stunting was most prevalent. Nearly 58 percent of the young nation's children suffered from the condition, while Germany had the lowest rate at 1.3 percent.—AFP



INDIA: This file photo shows four-year-old malnourished Indian child Shahadat Hussein as he lies on a bed at the Nutritional Rehabilitation Centre at Darbhanga Medical College and hospital in Darbhanga in the eastern Indian state of Bihar. — AFP

AFRICAN CHILDREN TO SUFFER AS EL NINO WINDS DOWN: NGO

NAIROBI: Millions of children will suffer disproportionately from the failed harvests and devastated livelihoods left behind by the El Nino weather phenomenon, Save the Children warned yesterday. El Nino affects rainfall patterns and causes both drought and flooding. As it recedes the Pacific cooling trend known as La Nina is set to begin. "Children face protection risks as families and communities move in search of work, food, water and grazing land for animals," said David Wright, the charity's East and Southern Africa Regional Director.

The charity estimated that 26.5 million children could face malnutrition, water shortages and disease in affected African regions. "Children are also finding it difficult to stay in school, due to hunger or lack of water," Wright added in a statement. The 2015-2016 El Nino, one of the most powerful on record, has caused significant dam-

age across several east and southern African countries, sending hunger levels spiraling and leading to greater spread of diseases. Ethiopia has been experiencing its worst drought in 50 years, while Zimbabwe, Malawi and Mozambique all issued drought alerts earlier in 2016.

Despite African governments' best efforts the "sheer scale" of El Nino this time had outdone the states' capacity to deal with the crisis, according to Save the Children. But the worst could be yet to come, Wright said, with the threat of La Nina further destabilizing affected communities. "The full force will be felt over the coming months," he said, announcing a humanitarian appeal launched by The South African Development Community (SADC). Three UN bodies estimated in early July that about 40 million people in east and southern Africa would not have enough food in the aftermath of El Nino.—AFP

TROPICAL STORM DARBY MOVES AWAY; MORE RAIN FOR HAWAII

HONOLULU: The first storm of the hurricane season to impact Hawaii sent the islands' residents into hurried preparation mode, but the state got through the weekend without seeing major damage as the storm was downgraded, officials said Monday. Still, moderate to heavy rain was swamping parts of Oahu, and flooding was expected to persist in areas where drainage was poor, officials said. Honolulu police urged drivers to stay off roadways and avoid flooding that began late Sunday on the H-1 Freeway and some other major thoroughfares. The freeway was reopened early Monday.

More than 3 inches of rain was possible for parts of the islands as Darby moved away from the state, forecasters said. The National Weather service said Darby had been downgraded from a tropical storm to a tropical depression. Forecasters expect the storm to dissipate by Wednesday. Darby was about 55 miles west of Kauai early Monday and moving away from the island at about 12 mph (19.31 kph) with maximum sustained winds at 35 mph and higher gusts.

Crews had responded to dozens of weather-related incidents, KHON-TV reported, including 59 calls for water evacuation due to flooding. A sewer near the Ala

Moana Shopping Center overflowed, spilling more than 1,000 gallons before crews stopped it late Sunday. On Monday, city and state officials were busy dealing with five other sewage spills across Oahu - with the largest being 42,000 gallons at the Kailua Wastewater Treatment Plant, said Watson Okubo, a supervisor with the state Department of Health's Clean Water Branch.

Various brown water advisories were issued for coastal water off Oahu, the Big Island and Kauai from storm and flood runoff. Not all waters may be affected but officials advise staying out of the water if it's brown. The office of Kauai Mayor Bernard P. Carvalho Jr said no road closures or damage were reported a day after he had signed an emergency proclamation. Some damage occurred on the Big Island.

A 70-foot vessel with 300 gallons of diesel aboard broke from its mooring and sank Sunday, sending debris onto shore. The boat's owner is arranging cleanup. Popular east Honolulu tourist attraction Hanauma Bay reopened on Monday. The Red Cross says more than 200 people stayed in shelters on Oahu overnight and more stayed in the facilities Friday and Saturday in Hawaii and Maui counties. All statewide evacuations shelters were closed by Monday.—AP



HAWAII: This photo provided by the Hawaii Dept of Land and Natural Resources shows a portion of a capsized vessel. — AP

LAUGHING GAS MIX-UP KILLS BABY IN AUSTRALIA

SYDNEY: A newborn baby has died after being given "laughing gas" instead of oxygen in a tragic mix-up at an Australian hospital which left another infant severely disabled, authorities said yesterday. A doctor raised the alarm after the baby boy died unexpectedly earlier this month, with tests revealing that an outlet in the wall at Sydney's Bankstown-Lidcombe Hospital was emitting nitrous oxide instead of oxygen. Another baby is fighting for her life after being wrongly administered the incorrect gas in June.

New South Wales Health Minister Jillian Skinner, who has ordered an investigation, said she felt "profound sorrow" at the "tragic mistake". "There were only two babies affected fortunately," she told reporters in Sydney.

"I am assured there are no other incidents such as this." The gas bungles come less than six months after it was revealed that dozens of cancer patients at another Sydney hospital were given the wrong chemotherapy dosages as long ago as 2012.

Skinner said she had no plans to resign. "If it was found that there was total negligence, something that I personally could have prevented, that might be when I would say I'll resign but I'm not convinced that that's the case in this situation," she said. The uncle of the dead boy, David Kharma, said the family were in shock at what had happened. "You can't imagine living in a developed country in the 21st century and stuff like this happening," he told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.—AFP

1ST MEDICAL MARIJUANA DISPENSARY TO OPEN IN NORTHWEST FLORIDA

TALLAHASSEE, Florida: The first medical marijuana dispensary in Florida is slated to open. Tuelieve, the approved organization in northwest Florida, is set to open a dispensary in Tallahassee on Tuesday, one week after being given dispensing authorization by Florida's health department. The state's Office of Compassionate Use, which was formed to oversee state regulation of medical marijuana, projects that there will be dis-

persing locations in 19 cities by the time all six organizations are up and running.

The Legislature gave limited approval to medical marijuana in 2014, with many expecting it to be available early in 2015. The process was beset by administrative delays. Patients suffering from cancer, epilepsy, chronic seizures and chronic muscle spasms can order medical marijuana by contacting their physician, as long as both are in a state registry.—AP