

## VANUATU VOLCANO PUTS ON A GLITTERING, PRIMAL SHOW

**TANNA ISLAND, Vanuatu:** It's constantly hissing, fussing and belching, but every half hour or so Yasur volcano sends up a tremendous spurt of lava and a boom so loud it is deafening on the crater rim and can be heard for miles. At dusk, the explosions begin to resemble fireworks, the lava glittering as it falls from the sky.

At just 361 meters elevation, the volcano on the Pacific archipelago of Vanuatu is particularly accessible, and spectacularly active. Some have dubbed it the world's friendliest volcano, although its primal ferocity and occasionally dangerous eruptions of lava and gas would seem to defy that description.

Getting there is an adventure. Yasur is on Vanuatu's southern Tanna island, which doesn't have paved roads and where many of its 30,000 people continue to live as the islanders have for centuries, in simple thatch huts with pigs and chickens running freely. Legend has it that the volcano is a god. Kelson Hosea, who owns the rustic Jungle Oasis bungalows near the base of Yasur, said the story goes that Yasur returned home one day to find his two wives and four sons still at the beach, and in anger turned himself into a pig, before falling asleep.

"When the boys came back home with their mother, they saw the pig and they got angry," he said. "They got angry and they didn't realize that it was their father. They thought it was a pig. And they killed the pig with a stick. And the pig exploded." He said the four distinct craters in the volcano represent the four sons. From the Tanna airport, the main transport across the island's rugged dirt roads is by truck. To enter the volcano

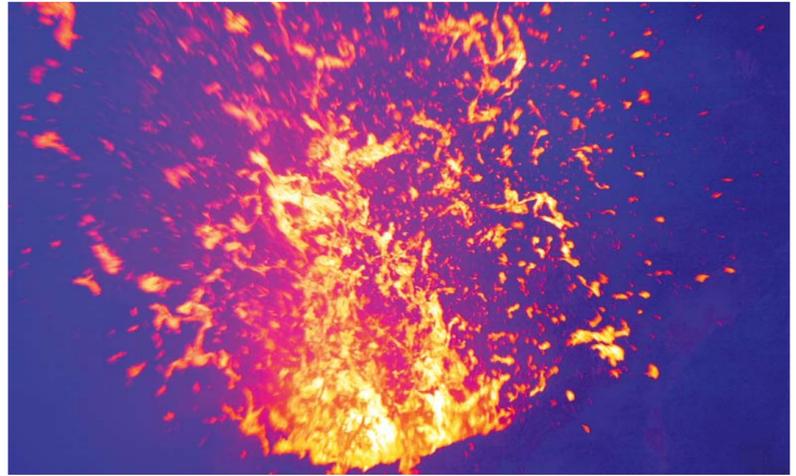
grounds, there is a 3,350 vatu (\$31) fee.

### Tourists can mail postcards

From the base, it's about a 90 minute hike to the crater rim. There's also an access road, and, for a fee, local drivers will take tourists up, leaving just a 15-minute walk across a rugged, barren moonscape to the rim. There's a lonely postal box near the top marked the "Volcano Post" where tourists can mail postcards. Authorities periodically close Yasur when the eruptions get too violent and it becomes too dangerous to stand near the crater rim.

Yoram Teitler, a geologist who was recently a research fellow at the University of Western Australia, said the volcano has been active for perhaps 2,000 years. It is constantly bubbling, with larger eruptions coming once or twice an hour. Observers can stand about 150 meters (500 feet) from the crater floor.

"It's quite rare to get such a kind of activity in a volcano," he said. "There are just a few examples in the world, and it's requiring the combination of very specific conditions. You need to have a specific viscosity of the lava, a specific amount of gases within the magma. And as well, a proper plumbing system to trigger such regular explosions." Teitler said that once people arrive on the rim, it's important to avoid the poisonous sulfurous gases coming from the craters and some side vents by taking a position upwind of them. He said that if the lava does explode beyond the rim, rather than running blindly away it's better to watch where the hunks are falling so you can avoid them. Vanuatu President Baldwin Lonsdale said the volcano has become a popular



**VANUATU:** In this June 1, 2015 photo, Yasur volcano erupts on Tanna Island. It's constantly hissing, fussing and belching, but every half hour or so Yasur volcano sends up a tremendous spurt of lava and a boom so loud it is deafening on the crater rim and can be heard for miles. — AP

tourist attraction and a place where locals are able to make some money.

"But people have to be very careful when they walk up the volcano," he said. "Because it's very dan-

gerous there." For those willing to brave the volcano at night, they can see a display that is both spectacular and elemental, one that creates new terrain and connects to the very origins of the planet. — AP

## RACKETEERING LAWSUITS USED TO FIGHT MARIJUANA INDUSTRY

### LAW GIVING NEW STRATEGIES FOR POT OPPONENTS

**DENVER:** A federal law crafted to fight the mob is giving marijuana opponents a new strategy in their battle to stop the expanding industry: racketeering lawsuits. A Colorado pot shop recently closed after a Washington-based group opposed to legal marijuana sued not just the pot shop but a laundry list of firms doing business with it - from its landlord and accountant to the Iowa bonding company guaranteeing its tax payments. One by one, many of the defendants agreed to stop doing business with Medical Marijuana of the Rockies, until the mountain shop closed its doors and had to sell off its pot at fire-sale prices.

With another lawsuit pending in southern Colorado, the cases represent a new approach to fighting marijuana. If the federal government won't stop its expansion, pot opponents say, federal racketeering lawsuits could. Marijuana may be legal under state law, but federal drug law still considers any marijuana business organized crime. "It is still illegal to cultivate, sell or possess marijuana under federal law," said Brian Barnes, lawyer for Safe Streets Alliance, a Washington-based anti-crime group that brought the lawsuits on behalf of neighbors of the two Colorado pot businesses.

### Novel approach

Lawyers on both sides say the Colorado racketeering approach is novel. "If our legal theory works, basically what it will mean is that folks who are participating in the marijuana industry in any capacity are exposing themselves to pretty significant liability," Barnes said. The 1970 Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act sets up federal criminal penalties for activity that benefits a criminal enterprise. The RICO Act also provides for civil lawsuits by people hurt by such racketeering - in this case, neighbors of the two businesses who claim the pot businesses could hurt their property values. If successful, civil lawsuits under the RICO Act trigger triple penalties.

Filed in February, the Colorado lawsuits have yet to go before a judge. But one has already had the intended effect. In April, three months after the RICO lawsuit was filed, Medical Marijuana of the Rockies closed. Owner Jerry Olson liquidated his inventory by selling marijuana for \$120 an ounce, far below average retail prices.

"I am being buried in legal procedure," Olson wrote on a fundraising Web page he created to fight the lawsuit. The effort so far has brought in just \$674.



**DENVER:** In this Feb 19, 2015 file photo, David Thompson, lawyer for the anti-pot group Safe Streets Alliance, announces a federal racketeering lawsuit to shut down the state's \$800-million-a-year marijuana industry. — AP

The closure came after the pot shop's bank, Bank of the West, closed the shop's account and was dismissed as a plaintiff.

"Its policy is never to offer accounts to recreational marijuana businesses," the court order said. And just last week, a bonding company in Des Moines, Iowa, paid \$50,000 to get out of the lawsuit. "We are out of the business of bonding marijuana businesses in Colorado and elsewhere until this is settled politically," said Therese Wielage, spokeswoman for Merchants Bonding Company Mutual.

### 'Chilling effect'

The case of the mountain pot shop shows that racketeering lawsuits can affect the marijuana industry even if the lawsuits never make it to a hearing. "This lawsuit is meant more to have a chilling effect on others than it is to benefit the plaintiffs," said Adam Wolf, Olson's lawyer. In the other Colorado lawsuit, against a dispensary called Alternative Holistic

Healing, the pot shop isn't going down so easily.

The shop owners are building a 5,000-square-foot warehouse in southern Colorado for growing pot, despite being sued by neighboring property owners for affecting their mountain views. A construction company and insurance company working with Alternative Holistic Healing haven't abandoned the job. "It's a frivolous lawsuit," said the pot shop's lawyer, Matthew Buck. "It has not affected (the pot shop owners) whatsoever."

But the marijuana opponents funding the lawsuit say they're ready to expand the test lawsuits to more marijuana businesses. The end goal, they say, is clear: to stop the whole pot industry in its tracks. "We're putting a bounty on the heads of anyone doing business with the marijuana industry," Barnes said. "Just because you see what appears to be this unstoppable growth of marijuana, we disagree. We're starting to change the economics of the marijuana industry." — AP

## BRITISH PM BACKS DOWN AFTER HUNTING FURORE

**LONDON:** The British government was forced into a dramatic climbdown yesterday after its plans to relax a ban on fox hunting reopened the bitter divisions that surrounded the introduction of the law a decade ago. As hundreds of anti-hunting protesters including Queen guitarist Brian May rallied outside parliament in London, a government source said a vote by lawmakers to amend the rules would be postponed.

The source blamed a decision on Monday by the Scottish National Party (SNP) and its 56 MPs to block the change, saying: "This happened because (SNP leader) Nicola Sturgeon has done a 180-degree U-turn." The source did not give a new date for the vote, which had been scheduled today. Prime Minister David Cameron's Conservative government had portrayed the change to the contentious 2004 Hunting Act as a purely technical move to resolve discrepancies between Scottish and English law.

Pro-hunt supporters lobbied hard for the measure, which would have allowed farmers in England and Wales to use packs of dogs to "flush out" foxes to be shot, as in Scotland. The current English law restricts the numbers of hounds permitted to two. Opponents had accused Cameron, who says people "should have the freedom to hunt" and promised to repeal the ban in the Conservative election manifesto, of trying to repeal the legislation via the back door.

### 'Purely about prejudice'

The issue has revived the passions that made the Hunting Act one of Britain's most controversial laws forced through parliament by the then Labour government after 700 hours of debate. May, now vice president of the RSPCA animal welfare charity, accused supporters of hunting of "sadism" and said they "like causing pain".

Tim Bonner of the Countryside Alliance, which has led calls for the ban to be repealed,

replied that such activists had "no interest in animal welfare, it's purely about prejudice against people who they think they hate". The issue splits along party lines, with the majority Conservatives supporting hunting and the opposition Labour Party opposed. However, up to 40 of the 330 Conservative MPs, including two ministers, would reportedly have voted against the change.

The SNP's decision to oppose amendment, despite earlier saying that they would not vote on hunting because it was an issue only affecting England and Wales, made a government defeat a near certainty. Despite the government's change of heart, the issue of hunting is now back on the agenda as Cameron promised in his manifesto for the May general election, which his party won, to hold a vote on repealing the ban by 2020. A YouGov poll in January found 51 percent still back the Hunting Act, although this is down from 61 percent in 2004.

### 'Cruel blood sport'

Few British laws have been as controversial. In 2004, the ban had to be forced through with a little-used power against the opposition of parliament's appointed upper House of Lords. Anti-hunting campaigners claimed they were on a moral crusade against wanton cruelty to animals, but 400,000 people took to the streets to oppose the ban, accusing ministers of class war and an assault on rural life.

Since then, the fight has continued as activists try to catch hunts breaking the law and the Countryside Alliance continues to lobby for a repeal — and the old antagonism broke out into the open ahead of this week's vote. Supporters of fox-hunting point to its centuries-old role in pest control and wildlife management, although it is also a much-loved sport of the upper-classes, who don red coats to ride after baying hounds as they sniff out their prey. — AFP

## CONTROVERSIAL RUBBISH GETS SENT TO PHILIPPINE LANDFILL

**MANILA:** Tons of imported Canadian rubbish has been sent to a northern Philippines landfill, ending a two-year standoff with activists who called for the waste to be returned to Canada, officials said yesterday. The 55 containers full of household rubbish were seized at Manila's port in mid-2013 on grounds that the waste was being passed off as plastic scrap material for recycling.

The country's Customs Bureau initially labeled the rubbish "contraband", but the Canadian embassy said the Philippine government later agreed to "dispose of the shipment in an environmentally sound manner in accordance with its laws and regulations".

"The government of Canada worked closely with the government of the Philippines with regard to the shipment," the Canadian embassy in Manila said in a statement. Trucks began hauling the estimated 1,375 tons of waste to a landfill about a three-hour drive north of Manila

in late June. Disposal teams are set to finish transporting the rest of the waste soon, the Customs Bureau and landfill operator said.

Activists remain angry that the garbage is being sent to a landfill in the Philippines, instead of being returned to Canada. "It's sad that local communities will be the ones to suffer from this foreign waste dumping in our land," Angelica Carballo, communications manager for the Manila-based environmental watchdog group Ban Toxics, told AFP. "It's sad that our government appears to be conniving with Canada."

While local officials claim the Philippine government has certified that the material was not toxic or hazardous, Carballo insists that the rubbish contains "electronic waste" that the landfill is not allowed to process. The fiasco has become a major rallying point for local environmentalists, who have held protests at the Canadian embassy demanding that Ottawa take the rubbish back. — AFP



**CAPAS TARLAC, Philippines:** This handout photo taken on June 27, 2015 and received on July 14 from Metro Clark Waste Management Corp (MCWM) shows heavy machinery unloading garbage imported from Canada for disposal at the Metro Clark Waste Management Corp landfill. — AFP

## SUMMER ACADEMY PREPARING YOUNG REFUGEES FOR SCHOOLS

**NEW YORK:** Boarding school in Kathmandu and public school in New York City are thousands of miles apart in more ways than one. "The system how they teach is very different," said 18-year-old Pasang Sherpa, who arrived in New York four years ago. "In Nepal, we only memorized from the textbooks." Thousands of students like Sherpa enter the city's schools every year from countries where education systems differ widely from a US classroom. Many know little English and some have had no formal schooling at all.

The transition for Sherpa was smoothed by the Refugee Youth Summer Academy, a 16-year-old project of the International Rescue Committee, a nongovern-

mental organization that resettles refugees. About 130 students from more than 30 countries are enrolled in this summer's six-week session, which started July 6 in a public school building near Wall Street. Along with English, math, social studies and the arts, they are learning how to navigate New York City and how to handle themselves in school. "The idea of questioning a teacher in many cultures is so counter to what they've been taught," said Principal Kira O'Brien, "and yet so much of our education system is based on kids questioning." Sherpa, whose family left Nepal because of conflict between Maoist rebels and the government, went through the academy and is back this summer as

an assistant teacher.

### Sharing cultures

Sherpa said she was introduced to other cultures through the refugee academy. "In Nepal, there is only Nepali people and we don't really work with other people," she said. "And here I get to meet people from Burma, Africa, China. I share with them my culture and they share with me their culture." Sherpa was helping teach English to middle schoolers last week. Zain Younus, a bright-eyed 13-year-old from Pakistan, was the first to raise his hand. The refugee academy "gives me so much confidence to raise my hand," he said. "And it's so much fun."

I have new friends from different countries" Sara Rowbottom, the education and learning manager for the International Rescue Committee, said some of the academy's students are from refugee families that the committee is working to settle, while others have been referred by other organizations or by schools. Some students have been in the US only a few weeks while others have been in the country for a year or more. O'Brien, the principal, said some students are not literate either in English or in their native language. "We have some kids who had to work, some kids coming out of a place like Chad who because of conflict were not able to access education," she said.

### 160 languages

During the regular school year the students will join a system whose 1.1 million pupils speak about 160 languages. The New York City Department of Education does not track how many students are first-generation immigrants or how many are refugees, but Yalitz Vasquez, chief of staff for the department's Division of English Language Learners and Student Support, said there are about 150,000 students classified as English language learners. — AP



**NEW YORK:** In this Thursday, July 9, 2015 photo, assistant teacher Bassirou Kaba, (left) works with Enoush Younus during a High School 1 class at the Refugee Youth Summer Academy. — AP