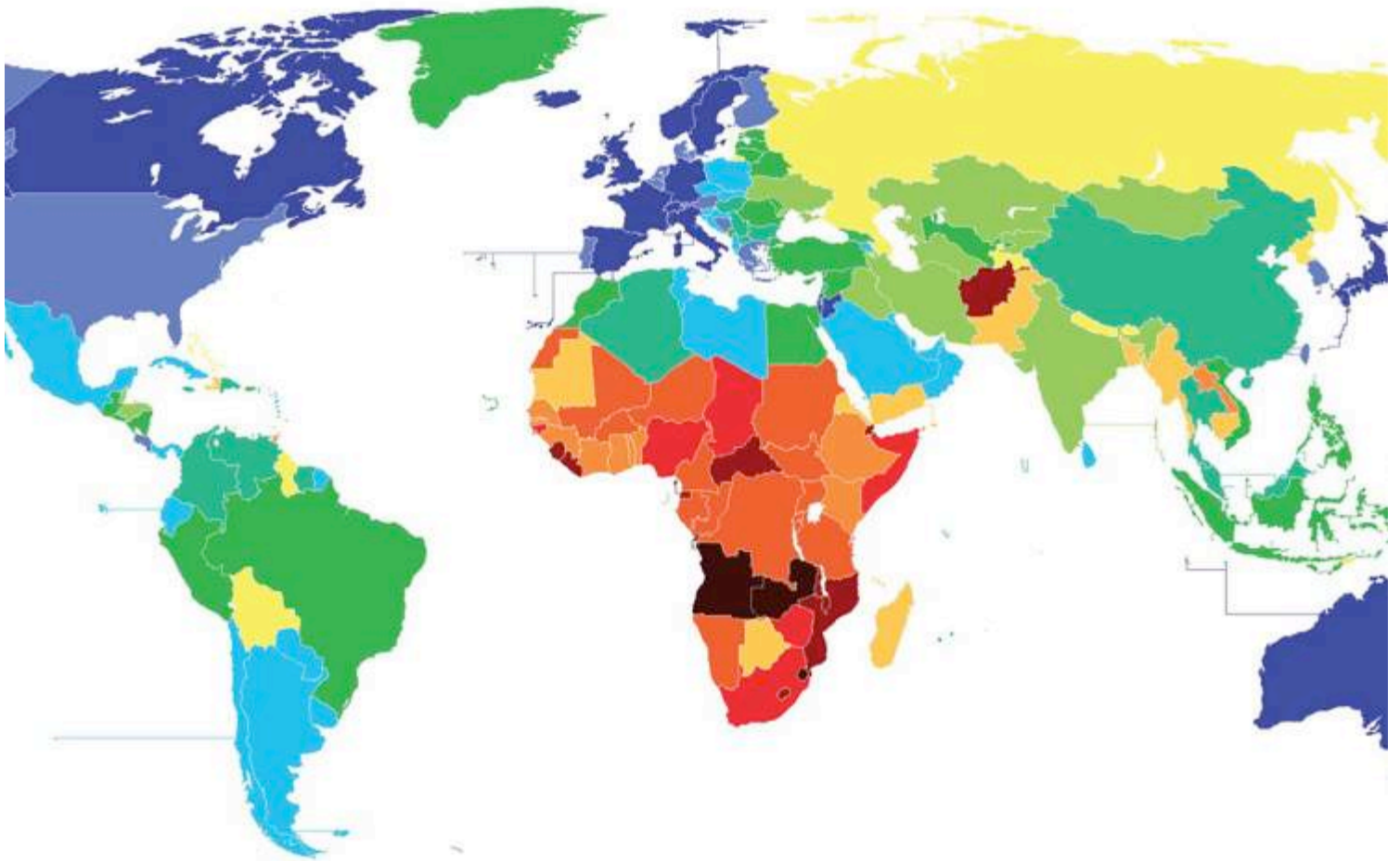


# UNDER THE MACROSCOPE



**T2  
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**TWO-THIRDS OF BRITISH PUBLIC BACK  
MICROBEAD BAN**

**NO MORE PSLE AGGREGATE SCORE  
FROM 2021**

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# Headlines

## STRONG EARTHQUAKE STRIKES JAPAN'S KYUSHU ISLAND, KILLING AT LEAST 9



*A collapsed wall in Mashiki, Kumamoto Prefecture, after a strong earthquake struck Japan on Thursday.*

A powerful earthquake struck the southwestern Japanese island of Kyushu on Thursday, killing nine people, collapsing roads and buildings, and knocking out power, officials said.

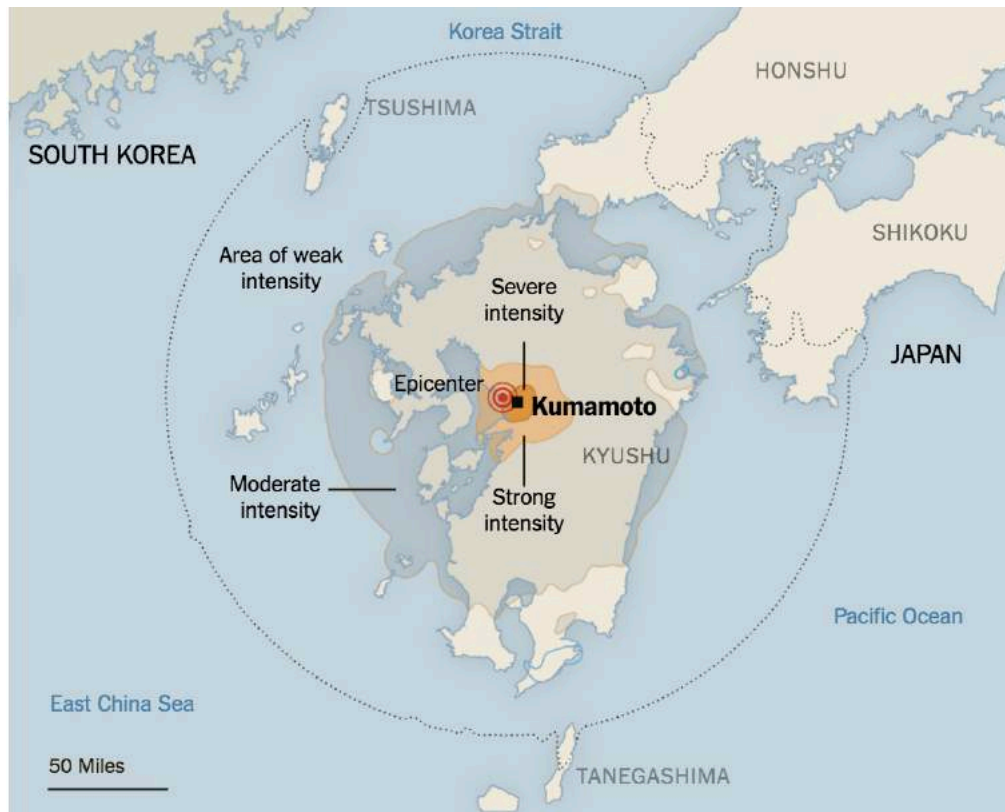
According to the government, some 1,000 people had been treated for injuries caused by the magnitude 6.2 quake, which struck just before 9:30 p.m. and was followed by a series

of powerful aftershocks. About 40,000 people spent the night outdoors or in temporary shelters.

Television footage showed firefighters battling flames in the most seriously affected area, in the town of Mashiki in rural Kumamoto Prefecture. The fires had been extinguished by Friday morning, as residents began to assess the extent of the damage. Some homes had collapsed into rubble, with tiles from broken roofs spilling onto narrow streets.

The authorities in Kumamoto said they had pulled several people from under collapsed buildings, according to NHK, the national broadcast network. Television reports showed the rescue of an infant, alive and apparently uninjured.

The earthquake knocked an out-of-service Shinkansen bullet train off its rails, JR Kyushu Railway reported. No one was hurt, the railway said. Television images also showed cracked and buckled roadways.



The Japan Meteorological Agency had reported the quake's preliminary magnitude at 6.5, strong but not at the top of the range for seismically unstable Japan. The earthquake that struck northeastern Japan in 2011, unleashing a powerful tsunami, measured 9.0. That disaster led to reactor meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

The earthquake on Thursday was centered on land, unlike the offshore quake five years ago, and its origin point was a relatively shallow six miles below the surface. As a result, there was no tsunami, but the shaking near the epicenter was especially strong.

In Mashiki, groups of people gathered in parking lots, parks and other open spaces after fleeing their homes. At a community center where some spent the night, workers dispensed blankets and emergency food rations.

In Kumamoto, a city of about 700,000 that is just a few miles to the west of Mashiki, damage to buildings and other infrastructure appeared to be comparatively light. Parts of the stone wall surrounding the city's black castle, whose fortifications date from the 15th century, were damaged.

Kyushu is home to the only Japanese nuclear power that remained in operation following the mass shutdown of the atomic-power industry in the wake of the Fukushima disaster.

The Kyushu Electric Power Company reported no problems at the two reactors at the facility, the Sendai Nuclear Power Plant, which is about 75 miles southwest of Mashiki.

*By The New York Times*



# Environment

## TWO-THIRDS OF BRITISH PUBLIC BACK MICROBEAD BAN

**Greenpeace poll finds 61% of women and 53% of men would follow US example and ban the use of plastic microbeads in exfoliant toiletries**



*A beauty consultant adjusts cosmetics at a L'Oréal counter. The French firm has said it will phase out microbeads by 2017.*

Almost two-thirds of the British public think plastic microbeads used in exfoliant toiletries should be banned, according to a poll for Greenpeace.

The tiny beads are too small to be filtered effectively by water treatment and flow into the oceans, where they harm fish and other sea life.

The US passed a ban at the end of 2015, with Canada set to follow suit and several EU nations - but not the UK - calling for a legal ban.

Plastic pollution in the oceans is a huge problem: 5 trillion pieces of plastic are floating in the world's seas, causing damage throughout the food chain. Microbeads, which are also used in some toothpastes, are a small but significant part of this.

"Microbeads are one of those rare environmental problems that are actually relatively easy to solve," said Louise Edge, oceans campaigner at Greenpeace UK.

"A ban is easy to introduce and alternatives are already available. Although it would not alone eradicate the problems caused by microplastics, it would set an important precedent in the UK that pumping plastics into our oceans is not acceptable."

A petition calling for a UK ban has attracted more than 250,000 signatures.

The poll, of 1,000 people and carried out by Censurwide, found that many people - 68% - did not know what microbeads are, although awareness was greater among women and younger people. However, when made aware of the US ban, 61% of British women and 53% of men said the UK should definitely follow suit, with just 9% saying there should not be a ban.

Microbeads are eaten by marine life, which mistake them for food particles. The tiny beads can also attract toxins from seawater, which are then passed up the food chain. Safe alternatives are already available, including ground nutshells and salt.

In March, environment minister George Eustice said: “[The government] Defra has been working with other countries in the Oslo and Paris Convention for the Protection of the North East Atlantic to secure the voluntary phasing-out of microplastics in personal care and cosmetic products. This campaign is making progress.”

A spokesman for the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs added: “Already many firms have taken action to remove microbeads from their products, but everyone can play their part in keeping our seas safe by making informed shopping decisions.”

The environmental audit committee of MPs launched an inquiry into microplastics last month, to investigate the extent of the damage to ecosystems and the health consequences for people of eating fish containing microplastics.

Some major toiletry manufacturers have already taken action to stop using microbeads. Unilever ended their use in 2015, while L’Oréal says it will have phased them out by 2017.

The poll also threw up some quirky results. Almost one in 10 respondents aged 16-24 said they thought microbeads were a sex toy, while more than 3% of men and 6% of Londoners said they had never bought toothpaste.

*By The Guardian*

# local

## PRIMARY: NO MORE PSLE AGGREGATE SCORE FROM 2021

The Education and Manpower ministries yesterday outlined a range of new measures to prepare students and workers for a more challenging economic landscape. We look at the key changes.



*PSLE results day for Kong Hwa pupils in 2014. The current PSLE aggregate score will be replaced, and the new scoring system will have wider scoring bands, like the grading at O and A levels. Marks will also not be based on how pupils do relative to their peers, as they are now.*

"The main issue to address is that the way we currently score the PSLE is too precise, and differentiates our students more finely than necessary," said Acting Minister for Education (Schools) Ng Chee Meng yesterday.

"The way that the T-score is calculated may have also created unhealthy competition among our young children."

The Ministry of Education (MOE) will take the next few years to develop and test the new exam system, plus how this affects the postings to secondary schools. MOE will reveal more details in the coming months.

The Primary School Leaving Examination's (PSLE) aggregate score will be a thing of the past from 2021, to reduce the obsession with academic results.

The new scoring system, which affects this year's Primary 1 pupils, will have wider scoring bands, like the grading at O and A levels. Marks will also not be based on how pupils do relative to their peers, as they are now.

The hope is that pupils will focus on their own learning rather than engage in a race with their peers.

Mr Ng hopes that with this shift towards a more holistic education system, children will get the time and space to "not just study the flowers, but also stop to smell the flowers, and wonder at their beauty".

*By The Straits Times*



## SHAKESPEARE IN THE PARK TO END?



*Thomas Pang and Cheryl Tan as Romeo And Juliet in the upcoming edition of Shakespeare In The Park.*

This could be the last year for the annual event as box-office takings cannot cover the cost of staging it

When the Singapore Repertory Theatre stages Romeo And Juliet at Fort Canning at the end of this month, there may be another theatrical tragedy in the making.

The group's artistic and managing director Gaurav Kripalani says this could be the last Shakespeare In The Park for several years.

Staging the annual event used to cost between \$1 million and \$1.2 million, but is now closer to \$1.5 million because of increased manpower costs. This is unsustainable, he says.

A total of between 25,000 and 30,000 viewers attend the event every year. Ticket prices this year range from \$40 for entrance alone to \$108 with drinks and canapes.

Box-office takings cannot cover the staging costs, since a third of the tickets are sold at a subsidised student rate. CHIJ Katong Convent, for example, has sent its Secondary 2 students to the event every year since 2011.

This year, a long-term sponsor, electronics distribution company Trans-Tec, has increased its sponsorship to help. "Despite this, we will still have a significant loss," says Mr Kripalani.

The Singapore Repertory Theatre first staged the event in 1997 with Hamlet. In 2007, the troupe made it a biennial event, starting with A Midsummer Night's Dream. The

2009 production of *Much Ado About Nothing* was nominated for Production Of The Year at the Life Theatre Awards and *Shakespeare In The Park* has been an annual affair since 2011.

Some actors see it as a rite of passage, including this year's 20something stars, Cheryl Tan (*Juliet*) and Thomas Pang (*Romeo*). Both are taking on a major professional production of Shakespeare for the first time.

Pang, 25, who was in a reworking of *Hamlet* last month, Cake Theatrical Productions' *Ophelia* at Esplanade Studio Theatre, says: "To me, *Romeo* is just like any other character, but the opportunity to play to such a large audience is exhilarating .

"It's frightening," says Tan, 27, of her performances, especially now that she knows the future of *Shakespeare In The Park* is in jeopardy.

The Singapore Repertory Theatre is banking on *Romeo And Juliet* and the buzz around Shakespeare's 400th death anniversary to bring in the crowds this year.

Acclaimed British opera director Daniel Slater, 49, will direct. This will be his first production of the play and he says the staging will evoke a modern city with Asian influences.

"It's not that we've set it in Singapore, but there's a feeling for Singapore," he says, down to replacing sword fights with tussles that involve knives, batons and kickboxing.

Among those looking forward to the event are husband and wife Elvin Teo and Tng Pei Wei, both 32, who are expecting their first child this year.

They have had picnic dates at *Shakespeare In The Park* since 2007. Mr Teo proposed to Ms Tng during *The Merchant Of Venice* in 2014. The cast called her onstage where Mr Teo played a ukulele and sang a Bruno Mars song.

Ms Tng is a finance manager who loves literature. Mr Teo, a harbour pilot with PSA Marine who says he has no background in literature, adds: "It helps to read the synopsis of the play before the show to know the gist of the story and understand the characters involved. It is also fun to have a loved one decipher the play and more interesting to learn about literature this way.

"It will be sad to see Shakespeare In The Park stopped as it has been an annual event for many people. We were hoping to catch this year's show after my wife's confinement."

*By The Straits Times*



# UNDER THE MACROSCOPE

Under the Macroscopic is a weekly summary of what's happening around the world and what's worth pondering. Stay on top of international and local news with this bulletin produced by the Raffles Economics and Current Affairs Society