

NEWS IN brief

UK storm moves north

BBC ONLINE

North-east England and north Wales are braced for possible flooding as the weather front which brought heavy rain to southern England moves north.

There are about 210 flood warnings and 300 flood alerts in England and Wales, and two flood alerts in Scotland.

This weekend 816 homes were flooded, mainly in south-west England.

Two people have died in the storms - a woman killed by a falling tree in Exeter and a man whose car crashed into a swollen river in Cambridgeshire.

Berlusconi to return to politics

REUTERS, Rome

Former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi said yesterday he was considering a political comeback for elections expected in March, but that the decision depended on who his centre-left adversaries selected as their main candidate.

A centre-left primary contest on Sunday left Democratic Party (PD) leader Pier Luigi Bersani, 61, ahead of his younger rival Matteo Renzi before a final runoff on Dec. 2, thanks mainly to his strong support among traditional PD voters.

Congo rebels in new talks

BBC ONLINE

The military commander of the M23 rebels is reported to have joined negotiations to end the fighting in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Sultani Makenga has flown to the Ugandan capital, Kampala, a rebel spokesman yesterday said.

The militia is refusing to end its occupation of the eastern city of Goma, hours before the expiry of a deadline for them to leave.

A regional summit at the weekend told the rebels to leave Goma by Monday.

Nigeria gunmen strike cops HQ

BBC ONLINE

Unknown gunmen have attacked a Nigerian police base in the capital, Abuja, where Boko Haram Islamist militants are often held, police say.

A police spokesman said the attack was repelled. Unconfirmed reports say some detainees were freed.

The Special Anti-Robbery Squad (Sars) headquarters is near several government buildings and security is normally extremely tight in the area.

Cough syrup kills 16 in Pakistan

AFP, Lahore, Pakistan

At least 16 people have died after drinking a toxic cough syrup in the Pakistani city of Lahore, forcing authorities to close three pharmacies and a medicine factory, officials said yesterday.

The deaths occurred in the low-income Shahdra Town neighbourhood between Friday and Sunday with the victims mostly drug addicts who took the syrup to get high, said local police station chief Atif Zulfiqar.

Australia apologises to victims

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

Australia's government has apologised to hundreds of victims of abuse within the military, clearing the way for victims to receive compensation.

In an address to parliament yesterday, Stephen Smith, defence minister, acknowledged that soldiers, sailors and members of the air force had suffered abuse, often by superiors under the excuse of toughening up younger recruits, since the early 1950s.

"Young men and women have endured sexual, physical or mental abuse from their colleagues which is not acceptable and does not reflect the values of a modern, diverse, tolerant Australian society," Smith told parliament.

Hubble discovers spiral galaxy

PTI, Washington

Astronomers claim to have spotted a new loose spiral galaxy filled with gas and dust, using the NASA/ESA Hubble Space Telescope.

The galaxy ESO 499-G37 lies in the southern border of the constellation of Hydra, which is shared with Antlia, NASA said in a statement.

The arms of a spiral galaxy have large amounts of gas and dust, and are often areas where new stars are constantly forming.

The galaxy's most characteristic feature is a bright elongated nucleus.

'Gangnam' most watched video

AFP, Seoul

South Korean pop sensation Psy's "Gangnam Style" on Saturday became YouTube's most-watched video of all time, registering more than 803 million views to overtake "Baby" by Canadian heartthrob Justin Bieber.

The rapper has rocketed to fame since "Gangnam Style" -- in which he performs his now famous horse-riding dance -- became a worldwide hit following its release in July.

Earlier, the song ousted Jennifer Lopez's dance hit "On the Floor" from second place on YouTube, and on Saturday it overtook Bieber's hit.

Cluster bombs kill 10 kids

Rebels capture regime airbase, plan post-Assad army

AGENCIES

Activists in Syria said a government jet yesterday dropped a cluster bomb on a playground, leaving 10 children dead, reported BBC.

Video posted on the internet showed children's bodies on the ground with their mothers grieving over them.

The children were killed when a MiG fighter bombed a playground in the village of Deir al-Asafir, east of Damascus, opposition activists said.

Intensive fighting has continued around the capital. Rebel fighters captured at least part of an airbase yesterday.

Further footage of the playground attack showed what appeared to be cluster bomblets on the ground.

Syrian rebels yesterday said they had captured a helicopter base east of Damascus after an overnight assault, their latest gain in a costly battle to unseat President Bashar al-Assad that is drawing nearer to his seat of power, reports Reuters news agency.

The Marj al-Sultan base, 15 km from the capital, is the second military facility on the

CIVIL WAR IN SYRIA



outskirts of the city reported to have fallen to Assad's opponents this month.

Activists said rebels had destroyed two helicopters and taken 15 prisoners.

In one video, two girls could be seen lying dead in a street while another showed a distraught mother standing, apparently inside a clinic, over her daughter's lifeless body.

Syrian rebel officers have formed a commission to lay the foundations for a future army and liaise with the political opposition on issues such as arming fighters on the ground, a spokesman yesterday said, reported AFP.

The announcement came in a video posted to YouTube on Sunday which shows some 50

Free Syrian Army officers wearing military fatigues assembled in a dimly lit basement room, one of whom reads a statement listing the objectives and basic principles agreed on during their gathering.

In recent months there have been mounting allegations that the Syrian government has resorted to using cluster bombs as the conflict intensifies, although those claims have been denied, the BBC's Jim Muir in neighbouring Lebanon reports.

Two cluster bombs were dropped on the village, activists said. One man told Reuters news agency that 70 bomblets had been found.

"None of those killed was older than 15 years old," Abu Kassem, an activist in Deir al-Asafir told Reuters.

He said 15 people had been wounded in the attack and denied that rebel fighters were inside the village. They had been operating on the outskirts, he said.

Last month, Human Rights Watch said there had been an increase in online video reports purporting to show evidence of cluster bombs being dropped in the conflict, especially around the town of Maarat al-Numan.

'Nato missiles not for Syria no-fly zone'

REUTERS, Ankara

Nato surface-to-air missiles due to be stationed near Turkey's border with Syria will only be used to protect Turkish territory and not to establish a no-fly zone within Syria, the Turkish military yesterday said.

Turkey riled Syria, Russia and Iran by requesting the Nato surface-to-air Patriot system, designed to intercept aircraft or missiles, last Wednesday after weeks of talks on how to shore up security on its 900-km border as the conflict in Syria deepens.

Syria and its allies oppose any development that they perceive could be a first step to implement a no-fly zone.

CATALONIA POLLS Separatists win majority

BBC ONLINE

Voters in Spain's Catalonia region have given a majority to parties seeking Catalan independence.

However, Catalan President Artur Mas, who called the early election and pushed for independence, lost seats.

The left-wing separatist ERC won 21 seats. But a BBC correspondent says despite their combined majority, the parties may be unable to work together.

Both the CiU and ERC want to hold a referendum on independence from Spain.

Mas told the BBC he would consult the people on independence within the next four years.



UK urges US 'decisive' lead on Mid-East

BBC ONLINE

UK Foreign Secretary William Hague on Sunday called for a "decisive lead" from the United States in seeking a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"Some good" could come out of the Gaza crisis, he argued, if it was possible to open access in and out of Gaza and halt weapons smuggling into the area.

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas is set to ask the UN to back a bid for non-member observer state.

Israel opposes the plan which it says breaches the 1993 Oslo Accords.

Mr Abbas's departure for the UN on Monday comes days after the end of hostilities between Israel and Hamas militants ruling the Gaza Strip.

The eight days of violence claimed the lives of at least 158 people in Gaza and six in Israel.

Mr Abbas's adviser Sabri Saidam has told the BBC that "he came out of the Gaza war definitely more adamant to go to the United Nations".

UN climate summit opens in Qatar

AP, Doha, Qatar

UN talks on a new climate pact resumed yesterday in oil and gas-rich Qatar, where negotiators from nearly 200 countries will discuss fighting global warming and helping poor nations adapt to it.

The two-decade-old talks have not fulfilled their main purpose: reducing the greenhouse gas emissions that scientists say are warming the planet.

Attempts to create a new climate treaty failed in Copenhagen three years ago but countries agreed last year to try again, giving themselves a deadline of 2015 to adopt a new treaty.



UN Convention on Climate Change Executive Secretary Christiana Figueres and president of the 18th UNCCC, Abdullah bin Hamad Al-Attiyah, attend a press conference in Doha yesterday.

A host of issues need to be resolved by then, including how to spread the burden of emissions cuts between rich and poor countries. That's unlikely to be decided in the two-week talks in the Qatari capital of Doha, where negotiators will focus on extending the Kyoto Protocol, an emissions deal for industrialized countries, and trying to raise billions of dollars to help developing countries adapt to a shifting climate.

"We all realize why we are here, why we keep coming back year and after year," said South Africa Foreign Minister Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, who led last year's talks in Durban, South Africa. "We owe it to our people, the global citizenry. We owe it to our children to give them a safer future than what they are currently facing."

Hamas, Israel resume talks on Gaza blockade

AFP, Cairo

An Israeli delegation was to arrive yesterday in Cairo for indirect talks with Hamas on easing the Gaza blockade, the Palestinian faction's number two said, warning his group may act if there is any delay.

Mussa Abu Marzuk said Hamas did not commit to stop arming itself in truce talks that ended a week-long conflict in and around Gaza with an agreement for Israel to ease its blockade of the coastal territory.

"A team from the other side is coming to Cairo today," Abu Marzuk, based in Cairo since his movement's politburo left Damascus, told reporters in the Egyptian capital.

According to the Egyptian-mediated truce that ended the fighting on November 21, both sides would respect a ceasefire and then, 24 hours later, begin talks on easing the blockade.

"In the preliminary agreement, Israel agreed to widen the area (allowed to Palestinian fisherman off Gaza's coast) from three to six nautical miles, which started yesterday," said Abu Marzuk.

"That is unacceptable," he said, adding his movement was pressing for a larger coastal zone of 12 nautical miles. "The question of the sea is being discussed today."

China lands jet on first carrier

BBC ONLINE

China on Sunday successfully landed a jet fighter on its new aircraft carrier for the first time, officials say.

A Chinese-made J-15 fighter landed on the 300m (990ft) former Soviet carrier during recent exercises, China's defence ministry said on Sunday.

The Liaoning, China's first aircraft carrier, entered into service in September.

China says the vessel has had extensive sea trials and will increase its capacity to defend state interests.

Analysts say the aircraft carrier will allow Beijing to help project its military might in territorial disputes.

China's state TV showed a hook on the rear of the J-15 catching hold of a cable on the deck of the vessel to slow the plane to a halt during the drill.

China had not previously announced that its navy possessed such highly technical landing technology, according to the AFP news agency.

The J-15 can carry anti-ship, air-to-air and air-to-ground missiles as well as precision-guided bombs, China's official news agency Xinhua reported, citing unnamed naval sources.

Named after the province where it was refitted, the Liaoning is a refurbished Soviet ship purchased from Ukraine.



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