



A man clears a road covered with snow in the village of Medea, 100km south of Algiers

# Dozens die in cold snap

Think of Algeria and a snow storm does not usually come to mind

Meanwhile, the people of the Mediterranean country are having to get used to unprecedented amounts of the white stuff that have caused widespread chaos. Dozens of

deaths are being linked to the cold snap, amid traffic accidents and carbon monoxide poisoning caused by faulty heaters. And there is anger among residents of mountain villages which

have been totally cut off, with fuel and food supplies dwindling.

"No gas, no semolina, we are dead in here," said one man in the northern Medea region. "It seems

like we have no officials, no authorities, no municipality, nothing!"

Supplies have got through to some areas, despite much criticism of the official response.

More than 40 people have died in Algeria's cold spell. The northern tip of Africa has been hit by the same weather systems that caused recent freezing temperatures in Europe.

## Police remove Stuttgart rail protesters from trees

**German police intervened in large numbers overnight to remove opponents of the controversial rail project Stuttgart 21 from a public park**

A few dozen demonstrators had been camping out in trees due to be cut down to make way for building work. The planned railway will run under the Palace Garden and through the city centre, as part of a huge programme to turn Stuttgart into a major European transport hub linking Paris to Budapest. "We kept the opposition going here for a long time. We will accompany our trees until the bitter end, if necessary," said one protester.

More than 2,000 police officers were on duty. Rally organisers said some 4,000 demonstrators had gathered. The rail scheme has divided the local population. Last year, a majority voted in favour of the work continuing in a regional referendum. Police say that apart from minor interruptions the operation to clear the demonstrators was over by dawn.

## Troika inspectors gear up for Portugal bailout review

**Portugal is the latest stop for officials from the European Union, the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank on their debt crisis tour**

It is their third evaluation of the country's bailout programme and if they find it is on track, Lisbon will get the next 15 billion Euro instalment of the 78 billion Euros of aid it needs. Some changes to the programme are expected, but it is not thought they will be major and they will likely focus on structural reforms to make long-term economic growth possible. Portugal's economy slipped further into recession in the final quarter of last year and the govern-



A broker works in a trading room of a Portuguese bank

ment has predicted that it will contract by more than the three percent this year which has made economists think it will need further rescue help. There was good news on the borrowing front; however, as

Portugal sold all three billion Euros in treasury bills that it had on offer in its biggest debt sale since last year's bailout request.

It also was able to pay a lower rate of interest to borrow

than in previous auctions. The troika of lenders said last November they were satisfied with Portugal's performance but the recent spikes in the country's sovereign debt yields have called into question its ability to return to the bond market in the second half of 2013, as dictated by the bailout deal.

In that case it might have to follow Greece in seeking a bailout extension. Earlier this month Lisbon was forced to deny that it had already sounded out advisers on options for a debt restructuring. The troika's inspectors said they will remain in Portugal for about two weeks, analysing compliance and planning for coming quarters with the government.

## Naughty or nice: toymakers gear up for busy year during trade fair

**For toymakers it is never too early to think about Christmas and that is what they have been doing at New York's International Toy Fair, which is the industry largest gathering**

A big trend this year was traditional favourites adapted for high-tech use, like on tablet computers. Adrienne Appel, a trend specialist with the fair's organisers, the Toy

Industry Association, said, "When you have these physical toys, they kind of bring everybody back together around the table. It's a true family game night."

There were over 100,000 toys on display at the event with the makers of the new entries hoping they would have the wow factor to become a hit. Or you could go with products that are already guaranteed sellers,

such as tie-ins with successful movies.

The distributor of *Star Wars* merchandise is hoping the re-release in 3D of the latest *Star Wars* films will drive sales. Robyn Morgan is licensing director for Underground Toys, "With these products we've really been able to expand our distribution in a way that we couldn't with another licence that doesn't have the broad ap-

peal that *Star Wars* brings to the products we make."

Makers of traditional toys will be hoping that there is still room for their wares among the apps and the high-tech tie-ins. Analysts say the toy industry has remained resilient even in tough economic times, though manufacturers remain worried after last holiday season when toy sales fell three per cent in the United States.

## Swiss scientists plan space 'vacuum cleaner'

**Swiss scientists have announced plans to develop a vacuum cleaner for outer space**

Researchers at the Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne hope their CleanSpaceOne satellite will be able to start hoovering up debris within the next four years.

Two versions are being considered for the first prototype. One is a machine that scoops up debris and then burns itself up. The second is a model that retrieves the debris before ejecting it into the atmosphere.

## London 'second to Paris in best student cities'

**London has come second, beaten only by Paris, in a ranking of the world's 50 best cities for students**

Researchers considered cities with populations of more than 250,000 and home to two or more top universities. They looked at affordability and quality of life as well as the number and reputation of universities. Ben Sowter, lead researcher on QS Best Student Cities, said that though London had more world class universities than Paris it was more expensive. London scored well on the quality and reputation of its universities, including Imperial College, University College London and King's College London.

The two cities did similarly well on quality of life, student mix and how well employers rated their universities as a source of good recruits. But fees — calculated in this survey as £20,000 a year for international students from outside the European Union — meant that London lost out against Paris, where they are just £1,000.

## Concordia survivors demand refunds

Russian and US survivors from the Costa Concordia cruise ship disaster have joined forces with an Italian consumer group to press for over 400 million Euros in compensation. Costa has offered just 11,000 Euros plus a refund and travel home to the ship's 3,200 passengers. The offer does apply to those with injuries.