



Catalonia's separatist supporters meet at the entrance of Catalonia's Parliament during a session in Barcelona

Catalonia Parliament adopts declaration on region's sovereignty

Catalonia's Parliament has adopted a declaration of sovereignty, the first step towards a possible referendum on breaking away from Spain

The nationalist resolution was passed with 85 votes for and 41 against, increasing the pressure on Madrid. Catalonia's two main nationalist parties signed a pact last month pledging to hold a referendum next year. Speaking in Catalan before the vote, the president of the regional government Artur Mas said it would be

historic.

"Maybe it will not resolve our problems in 24 hours, but it will lead our country towards its destiny," he added. A few smaller parties backed the declaration, but it was opposed by the Catalan Socialist Party and Spain's governing centre-right People's Party.

Alicia Sanchez, head of

the People's Party of Catalonia said, "Most Catalanian people do not want independence, they do not want this division. What you are doing today is applying pressure in defiance of the Spanish Government."

Catalonia's nationalists were boosted by the unexpected size of a pro-independence rally in Barcelona

last September, when up to an estimated half a million people took to the streets. The declaration voted by parliament says the path towards self-determination, which is opposed by Madrid, will involve dialogue with the Spanish state, European institutions and the international community.

Egypt hungry for tourists

Tourism in Egypt is suffering from insecurity, two years after the Arab Spring revolution here

These days, there are sometimes more rent-a-camel owners around than customers. At the only original Wonder of the Ancient World that still stands, the Great Pyramid of Giza, business is hurting. Tourism brings in around 10 percent of



the country's income, and accounts for 12 percent of Egyptian employment.

The year before the Arab Spring uprisings, 2010, it rang up 9.5bn Euros, with around 15m tourists. The revolution early in 2011 would see a 30 percent dive in receipts, although last year saw a 16 percent recovery. The Islamic government forecast for 2020 is double the number of tourists: 30m. But that will depend on political stability. With sectarian

strife, labour demonstrations and 'baltagiya' organised bullying squads, the Minister of Tourism Hisham Zazou is said to have called for broad political support to ensure the protection of tourism.

Several countries' authorities advise against travel in some parts of Egypt, warning of terrorist and criminal threats to tourists.

Google's results shine

Google earnings from its core internet business came in much better than many analysts had predicted during the crucial fourth quarter of last year

They rose seven percent as online advertisers spent more money chasing holiday shoppers. For the whole fiscal year earnings by the company hit a record of \$50bn, that's 37.5bn Euros. However, its Motorola mobile phone division continues to lose money with an operating loss of \$353m during the quarter.

Google acquired Motorola Mobility last year, one of vari-

ous 'big bets' that Google Chief Executive Larry Page has made to better position the company for a changing technology landscape defined by mobile gadgets and social networking. Page said that Google had worked to do in 'managing our supply better as well as building a great customer experience', but said Google remains squarely focused on opportunities around devices such as smartphones. Asked about the potential threat from Facebook's recent launch of a social networking search product, Page cited Google's years of online search experience and innovations such as voice-based search.

Davos: the big top for an economic circus



The World Economic Forum (WEF) takes place in Davos

As the A-listers arrive in Davos police marksmen look down from this snow covered roofs of this picturesque Swiss ski resort

When the World Economic Forum comes to town everyone knows about it. Security is tight with police, army and air-force everywhere. Some 3,300 troops are on duty to protect the heads of states and an airspace of 46km radius has been secured around the Alpine village. The bill for all this is some 6.5 million Euros, paid for by Swiss taxpayers.

The crisis in Europe is a

hot potato at Davos. As the Greeks, Irish and Portuguese struggle with debt and Italy and Spain walk an economic tightrope others pounce and take advantage.

What about the bankers? Last year saw the money industry in crisis, not only did it lose massive amounts of cash, it lost credibility and trust. In Spain failing banks nearly brought the entire nation to its knees. It is unclear if any meaningful change in the way banks behave will result, but the sector has a long way to go before 'banker' stops being a dirty word.

Sun-powered boat to research Gulf Stream

In La Ciotat in the south of France, a very special boat is undergoing maintenance in a shipyard

The PlanetSolar is the only vessel that has sailed around the world using only solar power. It is big — 30 metres long — and generates its own energy from more than 500 square metres of solar panels. Having been round the world once, the boat is preparing for new adventures.

Dr. Pascal Goulpié, the managing director and co-founder of the project, noted, "In the beginning it was built to demonstrate the potential,

maturity and reliability of renewable energies because that was one of the first motivations — see what we can do — and today there it a lack of credibility concerning these renewable energies. But it has also become a communications platform. It is however a large boat and we want to show that we can carry large loads so we opened the boat to the public. They know this boat well, when we go into ports, this boat is a flag-carrier, a standard bearer. And today it



The PlanetSolar sun-powered boat sails around the world

is also a tool that we put at the service of the scientific community for projects concerning the environment."

In partnership with Ge-

neva University, the boat is taking a team of scientists to Florida this spring and then to Iceland, following the Gulf Stream, with the aim of col-

lecting new data.

Dr. Pascal Goulpié said, "The research carried out by the scientific team won't only be measuring the temperature. Obviously the Gulf Stream is a warm current. It is easy to determine whether or not we are in the Gulf Stream by taking the temperature. They will also measure biological activity in the sea by sampling phytoplanktons for example, and with a boat which doesn't emit any exhaust fumes or gases at all, we can be sure that the analysis will not be polluted by them."

Other research will also be carried out, like a test de-

veloped by Waste Free Ocean. The foundation will go to the North Atlantic Ocean Gyre, a huge garbage patch of plastic swirling endlessly in the sea, and PlanetSolar is well-equipped for the trip.

Bernard Merckx, of Waste Free Ocean explained, "Making a collection with a new type of boat using sustainable energy is the way we will find a solution for this waste, which is so far from any coastline. The Gyres we're talking about, for example. Today there are five known ones on the planet and we have to find a better solution than just using fishing boats."