

Meteorite shower causes mass casualties in Russia

A meteorite streaked across the sky and exploded over central Russia last Friday, raining fireballs over a vast area and causing a shock wave that smashed windows, damaged buildings and injured 1,200 people

A traffic camera captured the extremely rare moment when it passed over Chelyabinsk, a city some 1,500 kilometres east of Moscow. People heading to work in the city heard what sounded like an explosion, saw a bright light and then felt the shock wave.

Car alarms went off, thousands of windows shattered and mobile phone networks were disrupted. The Interior Ministry said the meteorite explosion also unleashed a sonic boom. No deaths were reported but some 1,200 people were injured, at least 200 of them children, and most from shards of glass. The fireball left fragments as far away as Cherbakul in Russia's



The trail of a falling object is seen in the Urals city of Chelyabinsk



This ice hole is the point of impact of a meteorite at lake Cherbakul

Ural Mountains, hitting the area with the power of an atomic bomb. The European Space Agency said its experts confirmed there was no connection with an asteroid the size of an Olympic swimming pool that passed Earth on last Friday night.

A large fragment from a meteor that crashed in Russia has landed in an icy lake, police say.

Scientists are keen to analyse the remnants, found near Cherbakul, a town in Chelyabinsk region. The Russian Academy of Sciences estimates that the meteor weighed about 10 tonnes and entered the Earth's atmosphere at a speed of at least 54,000 km/h (33,000mph).

Mobile phone sales down in 2012 says Gartner

Sales of mobile phones fell last year for the first time since 2009



The research company Gartner said that was due to 'tough economic conditions, shifting consumer preferences, and intense market competition.' However smartphone sales — which are dominated by Samsung and Apple — continued to rise and they should account for more than half the handsets sold this year.

Of the 1.75 billion phones of all kinds sold last year, Samsung had 22 percent of the market, Nokia 19 percent — the lowest it has ever been — and Apple 7.5 percent. Former market leader Nokia saw its smartphone sales worldwide fall by more than half from the previous year to 39.3 million as it changed operating systems. Apple's iPhone continues to dominate in the US. Another research company, Strategy Analytics, said in the fourth quarter of last year, Apple overtook Samsung with 34 percent of the handsets sold in the states being iPhones.

EU unveils revised 'Robin Hood' tax

The European Commission unveiled a new proposal for a tax on financial transactions that could be collected worldwide

Only 11 EU nations want to take part, but they need to strike a deal together before the levy can become a reality. Those countries are Germany; France; Austria; Belgium; Estonia; Greece; Italy; Portugal; Spain; Slovakia; and Slovenia.

Algirdas Semeta, EU Commissioner for Taxation said he was 'quite

optimistic that (those) member states will be able to reach an agreement relatively quickly'. The 11 countries that say they want to adopt the so-called FTT account for two-thirds of EU growth.

The European Commission says the tax on share, bond and derivative trades will raise up to 35 billion Euros a year. Yet its own study on the now-defunct pan-EU proposal found it would reduce economic growth. Investors, meanwhile, argue that the costs will be passed on to savers.

ATTAC, a lobby group in favour of the so-called Robin Hood tax, said any revenues raised should be used for fighting poverty.

Trades outside the FTT zone will not escape the levy. If a party to the trade is based in one of the 11 nations, then the tax would apply which gives it a potentially global reach. Non-FTT countries such as the UK are worried this could lead to discriminatory 'double taxation' and hamper the effectiveness of the EU's single market.

German airports disrupted by security staff strike

A strike by security guards over pay has disrupted travel for thousands of passengers passing through two of Germany's busiest airports

Around 400 workers walked out of Düsseldorf Airport in western Germany. That resulted in 183 flights being postponed until last Friday, the airport said. At the northern airport of Hamburg 103 flights were cancelled, affecting more than 17,000 passengers. Verdi — the German public services trade union — had called on the private sector security workers to strike from the start of the morning shift until midnight.

A spokesman for Verdi said the union was trying to force employers to put a 'negotiable' offer on the table and warned that further



Strike by security guards disrupted travel for passengers in Cologne

strikes would follow if this was not achieved. Verdi is calling for wage rises of between 2.50 and 3.64 Euros per hour for 34,000 security workers in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, where Düsseldorf airport is located.

In Hamburg the union is calling for a wage hike of 2.70 Euros for around 600 security workers. Works councils estimate that more than 70 percent of the employees work in the lowest wage group, earning just 8.23 Euros gross (\$11.06) per hour.

Eurozone recession worsens

The Eurozone slipped deeper than expected into recession in the final three months of last year

GDP declined 0.6 percent — the most since early 2009 — as the region's largest economies, Germany and France, shrank — by 0.6 and 0.3 percent respectively. The next two biggest — Italy and Spain — also remained deep in recession. 2012 was the first full year in which no quarter produced growth, based on figures for Eurozone member countries going back to 1995.

But Commerzbank economist, Peter Dixon said we shouldn't worry too much: "A negative figure for the fourth quarter in the Eurozone. But as we go forward, I think the signs are, we'll see some signs of stabilisation in the first half of 2013. I mean that's not to say we'll get big, positive, growth numbers. But something maybe flat, or maybe marginally negative in Q1 and hopefully something flat or maybe slightly positive in Q2."

He bases that on a rise in factory orders and industrial production in December and some encouraging signs from business surveys in the early part of this year, with resilient Germany expected to rebound first. The European Central Bank's economists are also predicting the Eurozone will pick up later in the year although that recovery could be threatened if the euro keeps strengthening. But the grim Eurozone GDP numbers spooked the foreign exchange markets, they were one of the factors that pushed the euro down against the dollar falling close to one percent during the trading day.

Arrivederci Roma — pope tells diocese he plans seclusion

There has been an emotional ceremony in the Vatican where the pope effectively said farewell to more than 1,000 priests from the Diocese of Rome

After stepping down as pope, Benedict will no longer be Bishop of Rome either. Speaking unscripted for more than half an hour the 85-year-old said he will see out a cloistered life in seclusion once he stands down at the end of the month.

"Even though I am withdrawing into prayer," he said. "I will always be close to all of you and I am sure that you will be close to me, even if I stay hidden from the world." It was the first time the pope has spoken publicly about specific details of his life after standing down.

Talk of seclusion might calm fears in some circles that the first living ex-pope for many centuries might continue to exert influence from the background.