

Hurricane-force winds add to UK flood misery

Parts of southern and western Britain are said to be in the grip of an 'unparalleled natural crisis' which shows no sign of ending

The developing crisis is topic number one in parliament. British Prime Minister David Cameron has taken personal responsibility for organising the relief effort and has cancelled a trip to the Middle East. The PM has announced a 6,000 Euro grant is to be made available to each flooded house and business to enable people to build better flood protection as they repair their properties.

And a further 12,000 Euros will be offered to help farmers. But there has been no sign yet of the government requesting European emergency funds to which the country is entitled. Meanwhile flooding in the Thames valley is spreading.

"It's going to keep getting worse

because we're downstream from the Thames as well, everything from there is going to be flooding down once the barriers and the weirs and the locks open," said Alex Staddon, a worker at Shepperton marina in Surrey which lies south of London.

Meanwhile, the Meteorological Office is keeping severe flood warnings in place for many southern and central regions.

Parts of southwest England have been underwater for weeks, following the wettest January in almost 250 years.

Three people have reportedly died as a result of the weather. Gales have lashed some areas of the UK at up to 129 kilometres per hour.

British police said a 49-year-old



The flooded central square in the village of Datchet in Berkshire

woman was killed in central London after part of a building collapsed on the car she was driving.

Meanwhile, tens of thousands of households have been left without electricity as the wind brought down power lines.

The southern coast of England has been particularly badly hit with high waves and strong winds battering the seafront.

A man on a cruise liner in the English Channel died when the ship was hit by a large wave during rough seas.

In Dorset damaged cars could be found among the wreckage of huts and other debris on a local beach.

But others in the town took advantage of the gusts, with a group of windsurfers seen riding the extreme waves.

Agreement reached towards ending dispute over Panama Canal expansion

The outline of a deal has been reached towards ending a lengthy budget dispute over the stalled project to expand the Panama Canal

It involves a proposal for insurers Zurich to transfer its surety bond into debt as a financing mechanism to go part way to covering a loan to complete the work. The administrator of the Panama Canal Authority Jorge Quijano hopes to find a way to fund \$1.6bn (1.17bn Euros) of cost overruns.

"We still have some topics to resolve and we are working in that direction. But patience is not finite and in truth we are thinking that this has to end soon," Quijano said.

A consortium led by Spain's Sacyr bid over \$3bn (2.2bn Euros) for the contract to build two new sets of locks for the Canal which connects the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Sacyr's bid was one billion less than its nearest competitor. The dispute over who should fund the overruns has delayed the project by weeks.

Airbus upbeat in Asia-Pacific, says dominates sales there

European planemaker Airbus says it is the dominant aircraft supplier there, winning 80 percent of all new business in the Asia-Pacific region last year



At the Singapore Airshow, Airbus bosses said they were optimistic about more orders, despite worries about the economies of emerging markets, many of which are located there. Airbus CEO Fabrice Bregier noted, "With an average increase in passenger traffic of six percent per year for the entire region for the next 20 years — and I believe this is pessimistic — I believe this region will grow even faster because year on year, our predictions are getting higher."

The European planemaker said that in 2013 it received 379 firm orders from the Asia-Pacific region. It also delivered 331 new aircraft, or over half of all new planes that entered into service with the region's airlines.

In Singapore, Airbus has been showing off the new A350, the first of which is due to be delivered by the end of this year to Qatar Airways. Nearly a third of the orders for the plane — its rival to the Boeing 787 Dreamliner — are from the Asia-Pacific region.

Doubts over China's strong January trade performance

China's trade performance was vastly better than forecast in January

The value of total exports climbed 10.6 percent from a year earlier. Imports also jumped 10 percent from a year ago — with growth hitting a six-month high.

Analysts said it was unusual because normally the Lunar New Year holiday pulls down China's trade activity. Consequently they were suspicious of the numbers, suspecting they had been inflated by transactions that had not really taken place. Traders have been known to fake deals to sneak cash into China in order to avoid government controls on movement of capital.

"We find this strong level of export growth puzzling," said Zhang Zhiwei, an economist at Nomura. "It is unclear to what extent the strong export data reflects the true strength in the economy."

A run of underwhelming economic data from China in recent weeks had steered investors for another disappointment, as markets braced themselves for more signs that the world's second-largest economy is losing momentum. Fears that China may be slipping into a sharper-than-expected slowdown were believed to have fed a fierce selloff in global financial markets in January, with emerging markets hit particularly hard.

Greek jobless rate hits new record of 28 percent

Greece's unemployment rate has hit new highs



Greece's unemployment rate rose further

Even amid tentative signs of economic recovery in the country, there is no let up in the pace of job shedding. Economists expect things to get worse in the early part of this

year as companies continue to restructure and fire workers.

"As expected, the labour market showed a lagging reaction to other positive signs in the economy. The

increase in unemployment is also due to a loss of support from tourism which was seen in the previous months," said economist Nikos Magginas at National Bank.

One Greek jobseeker explained that the only thing available for most people is temporary, government-funded work. She said, "We certainly don't see any positive signs, nothing to indicate that there are jobs. Everyone's looking, but there are just these programmes that last for five months, but then you're out of work again. You have a break from being on the dole, but it's just for five, or at most six months depending on the programme." Though life remains extremely difficult for millions, with 14 percent of the Greeks living in extreme poverty.

Can diuretic drugs fight autism?

Virgile is one of around 60 children in France who took part in a test trial to treat autism in 2012

They were administered a diuretic drug to determine whether this could alleviate their disorders. The treatment was based on the premise that the neurones of children suffering from autism contain abnormally high levels of chlorine. Using a diuretic

helps prevent the chlorine from entering the nervous cells. The trial proved positive and Virgile's health improved.

Conclusive tests have already been carried out on mice. Autistic mice with abnormally high levels of chlorine were given the diuretic, which helped lower chlorine levels the same way oxytocin does for women during childbirth. "Normally, during childbirth,

chlorine levels drop thanks to a hormone called oxytocin, and we have shown that that drop in chlorine levels, which plays an important role in protecting the brain of the embryo, doesn't occur in autistic mice at all," says Professor Yehezkel Ben-Ari, researcher at INSERM (the French Institute of Health and Medical Research).