

Sandstorms sweep through northern China



Tourists in mask visit Wanchun Pavilion in Jingshan Park in Beijing, capital of China, May 4, 2017. [Photo/Xinhua]

A sandstorm swept over much of north China including Beijing on Thursday, turning the sky yellow and reducing visibility.

The National Meteorological Center (NMC) continued its blue alert for sandstorms on Thursday evening, forecasting windy and dusty weather in north China for the next three days.

Since Wednesday, northern areas have witnessed the most severe sandstorms this year, affecting more than 10 provincial-level regions, including Beijing, Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang, and covering an area of 1.63 million square kilometers, NMC data showed.

Weather forecasting authorities in Beijing issued a yellow alert for strong winds at 4:35 p.m., predicting wind speeds of up to 80 km per hour on Friday.

Most monitoring stations in the southwestern part of Beijing showed PM10 readings of more than 2,000 micrograms per cubic meter of air at 8 a.m. Thursday, according to data from Beijing Municipal Environmental Monitoring Center.

Visibility across the city was as low as two kilometers, and the air pollution has been dragged to Level VI, the highest.

According to the Beijing Times, more than 40 flights at Beijing Capital International Airport were delayed, with another 15 canceled.

Neighboring Tianjin Municipality was also hit by dust and sand, which darkened the sky and affected traffic flow.

"The sky turned gray and the smell of dust and sand crept into my room this morning. My child complained about feeling uncomfortable after playing outside," said a Tianjin resident surnamed Liu.

Traffic authorities have advised drivers to reduce their speed and to use their fog lights.

According to Lu Huanzhen with Tianjin meteorological station, the sandstorm in Tianjin should be over by Friday night.

Sandstorms were also reported in north China's Hebei Province and are expected to clear from Friday.

Zhu Jiang, head of the Institute of Atmospheric Physics of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said the sand had traveled from Gansu, Inner Mongolia and Ningxia, as well as Mongolia.

Ejin Banner of Alxa League in Inner Mongolia saw the first sandstorm on Wednesday, with visibility reduced to less than 100 meters.

Strong winds reduced temperatures in the region by about four degrees Celsius. Local weather stations warned residents to keep their doors and windows closed, to buttress sheds and billboards, avoid riding bicycles and to remain alert for forest fires.

China has a four-tier color-coded system for severe weather, with red being the most serious, followed by orange, yellow and blue.

It is the first sandstorm across China this year, later and less frequent than previous years, considering at least two rounds of sandstorms had been recorded every May in past years.

Data showed the annual number of sandy days in Beijing decreased from 26 days at most in the 1950s to around three days after 2010.

Zhang Bihui, a senior engineer with the NMC environmental meteorological center, said the lower sandstorm frequency is attributed to climate change bringing weaker and less-frequent cold fronts and China's forestation efforts.

Zhang also said forests could only stop part of sand moving near the ground level, and the sand this time were actually blown to Beijing at a height of around 5,000 meters.

Sandy weather in Beijing is expected to end on Friday evening, but similar weather may be seen on Saturday and Sunday in China's southern regions.

Meeting between HRVP Federica Mogherini and Minister of Foreign Affairs Carlos Raúl Morales Moscoso, Minister of Labor Aura

The High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President Federica Mogherini met this afternoon with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Carlos Raúl Morales Moscoso, the Minister of Labour Aura Leticia Teleguario and the Minister of Interior Francisco Rivas of Guatemala.

They discussed the situation in Guatemala, including the progress towards a peaceful resolution of the dispute with Belize. They also commended the positive cooperation between the EU and Guatemala.

HRVP Mogherini and Minister Morales exchanged views on the political developments in the Latin America and Caribbean region. Both parties underlined the importance of the forthcoming Summit between the EU and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) for the strengthening of the bi-regional relations. The summit is due to take place in October this year in El Salvador.

Federica Mogherini meets with Talat Xhaferi, President of the Assembly of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Press Release

Federica Mogherini, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission, met this afternoon with Talat Xhaferi, newly-elected President of the Assembly of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia as part of his first official visit abroad.

In the discussion, High Representative Mogherini repeated the EU's strong condemnation of last week's violence in the Parliament against MPs and

journalists. She welcomed the election of Talat Xhaferi as a President of the Assembly by the majority of MPs, stressing that this is a role that needs to be above party and inter-ethnic politics, with the President of the Assembly working for the benefit of all citizens and communities. The EU is ready to work with him, the parliament and all other institutions to advance the Urgent Reform Priorities as well as the Pržino Agreement implementation.

The High Representative and the Speaker also looked at the way forward. The EU expects all political parties to engage constructively in the political process, including on government formation, and in the work of the new parliament.

[Emily Thornberry responding to reports the Tories are planning a vote on Syria if re-elected](#)

Emily Thornberry,
Shadow Foreign Secretary, responding to reports that the Tories are planning a vote on Syria if re-elected, said:

"Now the truth is out. A vote for the Tories is a vote to escalate the war in Syria and prolong the suffering of its people; to risk open conflict between our armed forces and those of Russia and Iran; and to follow Donald Trump's lead with blind loyalty, no matter where it takes us, and no matter what our other allies think. In short, it is a vote to repeat the mistakes of Iraq from a Prime Minister who just last weekend refused to accept that she got Iraq wrong.

"Instead of this headlong rush to war, the British government should be working flat out through the United Nations to support the current talks on de-escalation of the conflict, with a view to creating a permanent ceasefire, a political solution and a lasting peace. That is what the Syrian people need, not Theresa May's secret plans to escalate the war.

"These reports also reveal that – even on matters of peace and war – Tory MPs cannot be trusted to think independently and do what is best for the country. This increasingly authoritarian Prime Minister just sees them as voting fodder, and

if they are prepared to back her rush to war, they will also surely vote for a chaotic Brexit and the dismantling of our NHS. The only way to stop them is to vote Labour.”

COREPER Ambassadors accompanied by Antici visit EASO

On 4 May 2017, a delegation of COREPER Ambassadors accompanied by Antici, visited the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) Headquarters in Malta.

The delegation met with EASO's Executive Director, Jose Carreira and the Management Team of the Agency for a briefing on EASO's operational priorities in Italy and Greece, training activities and external dimension. Other topics discussed, were the newly proposed Regulations and Directive related to the Asylum Acquis, in particular the European Union Agency for Asylum.



Any further information on EASO may be obtained by contacting Mr. Jean-Pierre Schembri on the following e-mail address: jean-pierre.schembri@easo.europa.eu (follow us live on twitter @EASO).