

FEATURES STORIES

Thirteen dead amid California heavy rains and mudslides



At least 13 people are dead amid "waist-deep" mudslides in Southern California, where heavy rains triggered flooding, say officials. Some 163 people have been taken to hospital. Twenty had "storm-related injuries" and four were critically hurt. A group of up to 300 people are reportedly trapped in Romero Canyon, east of Santa Barbara. Police said the scene "looked like a World War One battlefield". The flooding and mudslides, affecting areas scorched by wildfires last month, have shut down more than 30 miles (48km) of the main coastal highway. Emergency services said a number of people are unaccounted for and they expect the death toll to rise. Thousands fled the deluge and more than 50 rescues have been performed. The hardest hit homes were those that were not in the evacuation zone, officials say. Heavy rain run-off caused mudflow in the community of Montecito, where some homes were knocked from their foundations, said Santa Barbara County Fire Department spokesman Mike Eliason. Boulders the size of small cars were rolling down hillsides and blocking roads, reports BBC News Los Angeles correspondent James Cook. Among those taken to safety was a 14-year-old girl who had been trapped for hours in the ruins of her home. The fire department published a picture of the girl encased in mud as she was led to safety. County Fire Captain Dave Zaniboni said that five people were found dead on Tuesday in Montecito and may have been killed as result of the storm. The upmarket neighbourhood includes homes owned by celebrities such as actor Rob Lowe and chat show host Ellen DeGeneres. Oprah Winfrey also has a property in Montecito that is reportedly worth nearly \$90m (£66m). The US Coast Guard has sent "multiple airships to support rescue operations" and warn the public not to fly drones, otherwise the flights will force to be grounded. Wildfires in December, including the Thomas Fire, swept through the area burning vegetation that helps prevent flooding and landslides. Thousands of California residents were asked to evacuate on Monday for the second time in two months. In Burbank, where waves of mud swept away vehicles, officials issued a mandatory evacuation order. Homeowners in the area shared photos of mud in their homes. Several roads are closed due to mudslides and debris, including the major thoroughfare Highway 101. After a wildfire, burned vegetation and charred soil create a water repellent layer which blocks water absorption and leads to an increased risk of mudslides and floods. "Recent burn areas will be especially vulnerable where dangerous mud and debris flows are possible," said the National Weather Service in a statement. The Federal Emergency Management Agency shared a warning for California homeowners explaining that homes that had never flooded before were now at risk. About 30,000 residents were under evacuation orders on Monday. This comes after a record-setting year of \$306bn (£226bn) of weather and climate-related disaster costs in the United States, the third warmest year on record, according to the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The storm over California is expected to produce 4 inches to 7 inches (10 to 18 cm) in the foothills and 9in (23cm) in select areas. Snow is falling at higher elevations, according to the National Weather Service. *BBC*

Perth bushfire paints skies 'vivid orange' Skies in Perth, Australia, turned dramatic colours after a bushfire blanketed the city with smoke. More than 150 firefighters fought the blaze as it burned through 3,000 acres (1,200ha) of bushland near the city on Sunday, authorities said. The fire prompted clouds of smoke and ash, with many locals posting photos on social media. Officials said the fire was being treated as suspicious, but nobody was hurt. Perth woman Geraldine McGregor, 34, said she witnessed "vivid orange skies" in the city's centre. "When I saw the smoke quickly fill the sky with that colour, I was worried, because I knew it could only mean a massive bushfire somewhere," she told the BBC. Others posted photos of the sky darkening across suburbs, and said ash was falling. Drivers were warned to drive carefully in the conditions. The smoke could even be seen from planes. Residents were warned that the fire posed a risk to lives and homes, but the threat was later downgraded when wind conditions changed. Authorities were also fighting a bushfire in New South Wales on Monday. Australia experienced one of its driest winters on record in 2017, heightening the fire danger for the summer season. *BBC*



Perth bushfire paints skies 'vivid orange'

From "Comedians Quote Book"

The reason I don't sign the organ-donor part of my driver's license is that I can imagine an accident where I'm badly injured and a very large cop is standing over me whose uncle needs a kidney.

Lou Schneider

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HOROSCOPE - FEBRUARY 2018

ARIES: BIRTHDAYS FROM 21 MARCH to 20 APRIL

General Highlights: In February 2018, the Zodiac sign of Aries will have to do a lot, but despite the fact that the direction has already been set long ago and the movement began without you realizing it, the end of your road will logically depend on you. There isn't and can't be any fatality here, since Mars and the Sun, your primary patrons, will be in a powerful and favorable position. This means that you have every chance to deal with any task you encounter on your road effortlessly. Now you will have to put the main emphasis on the area of career and business. Yes, this will be quite a peculiar aspect, because on the whole the current stage will tend towards personal, sensual and emotional aspects. However, the source of strength and the object of its application are two different, sometimes radically different things, so there is no contradiction here. The important thing is not to hurry, and in this sense February will continue the tradition established in January.



TAURUS: FROM 21 APRIL to 21 MAY

General Highlights: In February 2018, Taurians will have clear certainty that they can do literally anything, they just need to make an effort. This is an appropriate feeling, but it's another question entirely what it will take to get what you want. Firstly, it must be pointed out that for your sign this month will be the logical continuation of the preceding period. That is, many Zodiac signs will now be more active, striving for dynamics. None of this will be necessary for you – to achieve success now you need to keep calm and try to attain a balanced stance in any situation. A balance of forces will lead to the best outcome, although it won't be as easy as it seems. That is, due to Venus's influence it would sometimes be more logical for you to argue with someone, after breaking off all ties, or conversely, to proceed to make any needed concessions.



GEMINI: BIRTHDAYS FROM 22 MAY to 21 JUNE

General Highlights: In February 2018, Geminis will definitely experience an overwhelming desire to change something in the world around them. This will be similar to youthful maximalism, and the combination of Saturn and the Moon will be responsible for this. The latter's position will have fundamental significance, since this month it will become the "heavenly leader" of your element, the element of Air. If you really need to do something, something unusual, uncharacteristic for you (or appropriate but truly original), under no circumstances should you renounce this idea simply because those around you don't like it. They have their own lives, and you have yours, it's that simple! On the other hand, there is one restriction – your actions shouldn't interfere with other people one way or another, even potentially, otherwise success will turn its back on you, and then no matter how much effort you make, there won't be any visible result.



CANCER: BIRTHDAYS FROM 22 JUNE to 23 JULY

General Highlights: In February 2018, Cancer will be one of many signs for whom the current period will be radical in the fullest sense of the word. Thanks to the exclusively favorable position of Mars, the red planet will change from your worst enemy (since it usually corresponds to the fall of your sign) into a reliable and loyal ally. But the Moon, Cancer's regulator planet, will be left out. In conjunction with the general stellar combinations, this will give us the following characteristic of the period. A choice awaits you, although not an isolated one, and a lot could depend on this choice, but in the future – not right now. And this is where the main difficulty lies, since at the current stages you will be simply unable to assess how correctly or incorrectly you have acted. Understanding will come over the course of time, and with new circumstances, but this doesn't mean that you must constantly rack your brains, fretting about how well you behaved in any particular situation, or how well thought-through your plans were.



LEO: BIRTHDAYS FROM 24 JULY to 23 AUGUST

General Highlights: In February 2018, the Zodiac sign of Leo will literally be driven by fate. The position of the Sun, Leo's patron, will be particularly strong, whereas Pluto, your sign's planetary exultant, will lose all of its positive energy. Overall, we will get quite an interesting combination, which points to an absolutely neutral attitude from circumstances. In other words, at the current stage of life you virtually won't encounter any references to the right or wrong course of action. There may be difficulties, conflicts within the family too, but in virtually all of these situations, no external factors will have any tangible effect on you. It is likely that several Leos who from birth have grown accustomed to fighting for their position under the sun, this will come as a shock. Nevertheless, you will have to come to terms with this, but this will not be all that difficult, since the dynamics of this month will not be so significant for you personally.



VIRGO: BIRTHDAYS FROM 24 AUGUST to 23 SEPTEMBER

General Highlights: In February 2018, Virgos will have to trust their feelings far more than they usually do. The thing is, at the current stage Mercury, your main planetary patron, will take up a moderate position, whereas Saturn, the patron of all Earth element signs, will give you all kinds of support, first and foremost through the "sixth sense". This means that if circumstances do not unfold in the most favorable way, but you sense that everything will work out for you, then there's no point milling around, rechecking and analyzing everything for the tenth time. This will be a good time in the sense that not a single sign will find itself in a situation where time is working against them. In this regard, Virgo will be no exception, but unlike the majority of signs, Virgo will sometimes need to take part in the riskiest ventures. Right now, the risk will really be a good thing, but only if your senses whisper to you that it is a lucky turn.



LIBRA: BIRTHDAYS FROM 24 SEPTEMBER to 23 OCTOBER

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SCORPIO: BIRTHDAYS FROM 24 OCTOBER to 22 NOVEMBER

General Highlights: For Scorpios, February 2018 could easily become a special time, at least because your planetary leader, Mars, will be in a dominant position now. You will literally physically sense the burst of power, energy, and emotions. In the area of work, you will probably be provided with more resources, but even if this doesn't happen, you will find everything you need yourself. There is potential for bright, effervescent, and living energy, you just need to discover it. In order to do this, it will suffice not to give in to depression, and get a grip on yourself when it seems like you won't manage on your own, and there are no true allies nearby. However, this is only one of the possible courses of action, the situation could also develop according to your own scenario, because now you will now have a crucial influence on the reality around you. But don't forget about responsibility. Thanks to Mars, your strength will now be exceptional, but each action will have unavoidable consequences. Whether they are positive or negative depends on you.



SAGITTARIUS: BIRTHDAYS FROM 23 NOVEMBER to 23 DECEMBER

General Highlights: In February 2018, Sagittarians can achieve what they want only if they are particularly attentive. The thing is, Jupiter, your primary patron, will be more like an enemy than an ally at this stage, and you shouldn't expect any help from him. And the element of fire won't have a "celestial leader" either, but Venus will stay with you. The loyal heavenly priestess will try to ensure that you have no problems in the area of personal relations. In addition, you can count on a permanent sharpening of your intuition. You will control your emotions easily, even if you lacked such a talent in the past. On the whole, this period promises to be quite dynamic, especially if you make an effort. As for many other signs, at this stage you should devote as much time as possible to yourself. This could be anything at all – hobbies, improving your professional qualifications, or just rest with the goal of maximizing relaxation.



CAPRICORN: BIRTHDAYS FROM 22 DECEMBER to 20 JANUARY

General Highlights: Despite the fact that Capricorn's planetary exultant, boisterous Mars, will take up an extremely favorable position in February 2018, on the whole this period will be quite calm, even moderate, continuing the trends which prevailed in January. It's appropriate to point out that such a state of affairs won't be every Capricorn's cup of tea – many will expect action, activity, and the implementation of plans! Nevertheless, you will understand almost immediately that at this moment, circumstances are facilitating a completely different strategy. Something which you planned for this month will be postponed, something will become irrelevant. Suddenly a lot of time will free up, and you will definitely have to spend it somehow, but whether you spend it well or not is up to you. The important thing here is not to neglect the unexpected break, since you can be sure that ahead of you there are lots of vivid and interesting moments, such that you will even be envious of your "February self". On the other hand, nobody is saying that nothing is going to happen now.



AQUARIUS: BIRTHDAYS 21 JANUARY to 19 FEBRUARY

General Highlights: For Aquarius, February 2018 will be a long-awaited time. You will finally be able to use all your opportunities, to play at full strength! This will be a truly positive and extremely promising time, which will open lots of new doors before you, literally from the first few days. You will be assisted by your traditional patrons, Saturn and Mars, who are a powerful duo, and can guarantee protection from negative circumstances in any area. Nevertheless, as in any other scenario, without your active involvement, without the necessary motivation, you won't be able to achieve the results you want. But this is unlikely to become a problem, because in February you will have enough resources and enough opportunities. The important thing is not to overexert yourself, since the temporal stages will constantly change, and a period of vivid activity could be followed by quite a sharp decline.



PISCES: BIRTHDAYS: 20 FEBRUARY to 20 MARCH

General Highlights: For representatives of the Zodiac sign of Pisces, February 2018 will be quite a calm time, but it will have its own characteristic traits, which you will want to take into account. Firstly, it should be noted that this sign's primary patron, Jupiter, will be unable to help Pisces at this time, because it will take up a diametrically opposed position. However, this sign's exultant, Venus, will be strong on account of the position of the "celestial leader" of the element of Water. Overall, we will get a surprisingly colorful and unusual stage, which indicates that this month fortune will be on your side. This doesn't mean that you will suddenly win the lottery, but if over a long period of time you have done the same thing over and over again, the results will be much greater in scope. It's hard to describe this prediction more specifically. On the romantic front, it is most likely that single Pisces will finally manage to get the attention of the person they have been dreaming about. Married Pisces will deal with age-old conflicts, and when it comes to work, they will manage to get the coveted position.



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