

Opal causes \$1.8 billion damage to Florida

PANAMA CITY BEACH, Fla. — Under blue skies, the damage wrought by Hurricane Opal became clear Thursday: hundreds of houses smashed into splintered boards, condominiums flattened, hotel walls caved in and boats tossed ashore along 120 miles of eroded beach.

"This is what I call utter destruction," an astonished Al Donaldson said as the homeowner looked over Santa Rosa Beach, west of Panama City.

Opal, which hit land late Wednesday with gusts up to 144 mph, killed at least 15 people and caused an estimated \$1.8 billion in damage to insured property along the Florida Panhandle. That made it the second-costliest storm in state history after Hurricane Andrew, which inflicted \$17 billion in damage in 1992. Fifteen Panhandle counties were approved for federal emergency aid.

"Blocks and blocks of homes are gone," said Jo Miglino, a spokeswoman for the state Division of Emergency Management. "We have widespread reports ... of many, many

homes destroyed."

Opal lost its punch as it blew through Alabama but still knocked out power to 2 million in Florida, Georgia, Alabama and the Carolinas. Many homes also had no water or phone service.

Almost 4,500 National Guardsmen were posted in Florida to prevent looting. Bay County, where an estimated 100 homes were destroyed and 1,000 damaged, was under a dusk-to-dawn curfew, and the Guard set up a center to provide food, water, clothes and showers to people left homeless.

As Opal approached land Wednesday, more than 100,000 coastal residents fled inland, clogging highways. After the hurricane had passed, hundreds of people were frustrated when police refused to let them return to their homes.

"They're telling us some of the houses were blown right into the water," said Mike Moody, who was trying to get back to his home on Navarre Beach.

"We can't let people back — not even if they are trying to get back to

their homes," said Okaloosa County Sheriff's Deputy Rick Hord. "They would have no power and no sewage service. You can't even flush the toilets because there's no water. If there is water, it is likely to be full of disease."

By midday, Opal had been downgraded to a tropical depression and was 95 miles south of Lexington, Ky., with sustained winds of 35 mph.

The storm disrupted air traffic throughout the day, causing flight delays from Philadelphia, Boston, St. Louis, Chicago and New York, the Federal Aviation Administration said.

In a busy hurricane year, Opal stood out as one of the worst to hit the Gulf Coast since Hurricane Camille killed 256 people in 1969.

As Opal weakened over land, Tropical Storm Pablo, the 16th named storm of the season, formed off the African coast in the area of the Atlantic that has bred some of this season's most dangerous storms.

"It is not a threat right now. We ask that people pay attention because



Hurricane Opal damage

After growing into the strongest storm to hit the Gulf Coast since 1969, Opal waned quickly. It was downgraded Thursday to a tropical depression.

Preliminary damage reports

Florida
Damage estimates: \$1.8 billion
Left without power: 537,000

Georgia
Damage estimates: Not yet available
Left without power: 392,000

Alabama
Damage estimates: Not yet available
Left without power: Approx. 1 million
41,500 lost power in North and South Carolina.

AP/Wm. J. Castello, Tracie Tso

anything could happen," said forecaster Fiona Horsfall at the National Hurricane Center in Miami.

Officials didn't immediately know the number of buildings destroyed or people left homeless by Opal.



Cease-fire reached in Bosnia

ZAGREB, Croatia — Bosnia's combatants agreed on Thursday to a 60-day cease-fire and new talks on ending their 3 1/2 years of carnage, taking one big step closer to a peace settlement that U.S. troops would help police.

The accord on the cease-fire was reached during the United States' strongest press yet for peace in Bosnia. In announcing the agreement, President Clinton in Washington acknowledged that unresolved problems remained before it takes effect Tuesday.

"We need to be clear-eyed about this," he said. "It matters what the parties do, not just what they say."

NATO planners said they would hasten work on a military force to help enforce an eventual peace arrangement. The United States would commit roughly 20,000 troops to such a force, but is saying they would not enter Bosnia until a final peace deal is signed.

Media can open bureaus in Cuba

WASHINGTON — President Clinton has decided to allow U.S. news organizations to open bureaus in Cuba as part of an effort to increase communication between Cubans and Americans, administration officials said Thursday.

Clinton also will announce in a speech he will deliver on Friday that he hopes to increase academic exchanges between the two countries, the officials said.

The idea of allowing news bureaus to operate in Cuba has been in the works for almost two years. The administration has been holding back on an announcement because of opposition by some Cuban exile lawmakers.

Under the proposal, the officials said, Cuban media organizations also would be allowed to open bureaus in the United States. Just how soon such exchanges could take place is unclear. Fidel Castro's government would have to approve the exchanges and it hasn't been approached yet by the administration, officials said.

Truck slams into day-care center

OAKLAND, Calif. — An out-of-control pickup truck plowed into a day-care center playground Thursday, killing a toddler and injuring 10 other children, two of them critically.

TV stations reported that some witnesses said the truck had been drag racing and doing "doughnuts" in the street. The driver told police that she had swerved to avoid hitting a speeding car, the stations reported.

The 18-year-old driver was questioned by police. Charges were not immediately filed.

Ireland cheers for Nobel winner

BELFAST, Northern Ireland — Over three decades Seamus Heaney has built a reputation as the English language's greatest living poet, reflecting the wild beauty of Ireland and the passionate contradictions of his native north.

As he won the Nobel Prize for literature Thursday, friends and fans celebrated a shaggy-haired "teddy bear" who 10 years ago rejected the tribal labels of Catholic and Protestant to explore the divided national soul. "It's the kind of news that makes you want to jump in the air and cheer," said Frank Ormsby, a poet and editor of several anthologies of Northern Irish poetry.

"As a teacher, I know how enjoyable and accessible Heaney's work is in the classroom," Ormsby said. "At the same time it's got the kind of depth and profundity that challenges academics and critics. It's so rich and rewarding."

Israeli parliament ratifies accord

JERUSALEM — Accepting Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's plea to "give peace a chance," Israel's parliament voted early Friday to ratify an accord that grants the PLO control over West Bank cities and signals an end to 28 years of Israeli occupation.

The accord was approved 61-59 after a tumultuous 15-hour debate.

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, speaking last, defended the agreement against charges that it gives away too much to the Palestinians and endangers the safety of Israelis.

"We did not concede anything," he said. "The agreement did not create the reality. The reality created the agreement."

Earlier, more than 20,000 Israelis holding candles and chanting "Rabin is a traitor" marched from downtown Jerusalem to parliament to protest the Israel-PLO agreement.

The accord, signed last week in Washington, calls for an Israeli troop withdrawal from Palestinian towns by the end of the year, the deployment of 12,000 armed Palestinian police in the West Bank and Palestinian general elections.

Rabin told the parliament that bloodshed would continue unless Is-

rael ended its rule over the Palestinians.

"This (occupation) is not a solution for peace. ... We can continue to kill and be killed, but we can also try to stop this never-ending circle of violence," Rabin said in a 45-minute speech frequently interrupted by hecklers.

Rabin acknowledged that the agreement involves risks but said he could freeze the withdrawal at any moment if PLO chief Yasser Arafat does not live up to his commitments.

"This government decided to give peace a chance," he said.

Opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu predicted that Rabin's government would fall soon. "Soon a nationalist, responsible leadership will take control, a leadership that will return security to this country," he told protesters Thursday evening.

In parliament, Netanyahu accused Rabin of putting Israelis at risk.

"You are moving the border back to the lines of 1967," Netanyahu told Rabin, referring to the 1967 Middle East war in which Israel captured the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Rabin had declared the proceedings a vote of confidence in his gov-

ernment, meaning a defeat would have brought down his coalition.

The initial 1993 Israel-PLO framework agreement was approved by a vote of 61-50, with eight abstentions. That agreement led to the establishment in May 1993 of Palestinian self-rule in Gaza and the West Bank town of Jericho.

The new agreement establishes self-rule in Palestinian towns and villages in the West Bank, without defining the final borders or nature of the Palestinian territories. Talks on the final status of the territories are supposed to begin by May 1996.

Israeli officials said Thursday that troops would start withdrawing from the West Bank on Sunday and plan to be out of six cities by the end of the year.

An Israeli official said troops would be out of the first West Bank city, Jenin, by Nov. 19. In one-week intervals after that, the army will leave Tulikarem, Qalqilya, Nablus, Bethlehem and Ramallah. Redeployment in the seventh town, Hebron, is to be completed by the end of March.

Palestinians also will gain administrative control over 450 West Bank villages.

Court to rule on men's school

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court will decide whether Virginia Military Institute can remain all-male.

The court said Thursday it will study competing appeals — one by Virginia officials and one by the Clinton administration. A decision is expected by July.

The administration says the only way to guarantee women equal treatment is to admit them to VMI. A separate "women's VMI" begun this fall is as unlawful as segregated schools once created for blacks and whites, administration lawyers contend.

Virginia argues that the state-supported military college must keep female students out to preserve its educational goals. Women can attend other public colleges in Virginia, state officials note.

Even if the women's VMI program were dropped, the state adds, VMI should be allowed to remain all-male.

An eight-member court is expected to hear arguments in January. Justice Clarence Thomas disqualified himself in the case because his son, Jamal, is a VMI senior.

Virginia Gov. George Allen said

he is optimistic the court will uphold the state's program offering a VMI-like program for women.

"I think it's constitutional, but beyond all that I think it's a great idea," he said. "It's a way to allow those who want that VMI experience to continue to have it while ... young women also have that leadership opportunity in college."

VMI Superintendent Josiah Bunting III said Virginia offers "superb, single-gender opportunities for men and women alike. ... This case is ultimately about the ability of a state to provide opportunities that meet the varied educational needs of its young men and women."

Deborah Ellis, legal director of the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund, said, "I think the chances are good that the court will ... say that women have to be admitted to VMI."

She said the case could yield the most significant sex-discrimination ruling since 1976, when the justices ruled that "classifications by gender must serve important governmental objectives and must be substantially related to achievement of those objectives."

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