

NEWS DIGEST

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Hurricane Bret hits Gulf Coast

■ **Evacuation left parts of Texas south of Corpus Christi deserted as the storm reached land with 125-mph winds.**

CORPUS CHRISTI, Texas (AP) — Hurricane Bret, the biggest storm to hit Texas in nearly 20 years, roared ashore Sunday with horizontal sheets of rain and 125-mph winds that whipped and bent palm trees and forced thousands of people to flee inland.

The rapidly developing storm made landfall about 6 p.m. in sparsely populated Kenedy County, about 70 miles south of Corpus Christi.

Authorities reported no injuries in the hours just after landfall. No major damage was immediately apparent as the storm moved inland Sunday night, but there was no word about largely unpopulated areas directly in the hurricane's path.

Businesses and homes were shuttered from Brownsville to north of Corpus Christi, and highways leading

inland were packed with bumper-to-bumper traffic for miles.

Winds of 125 mph, with gusts even higher, extended 40 miles out from the storm. Forecasters warned about tornadoes spawned by the storm, a foot or more of rain and a storm surge that could approach 25 feet.

The tightly focused storm had the "clear potential of producing major disaster," said Jim Hoke, director of the National Weather Service's National Hydrometeorological Emergency Center. He compared the storm with Hurricane Andrew, which battered Florida in 1992.

But unlike Andrew, which hit densely populated South Florida, Bret hit between Corpus Christi (population of 275,000) and Brownsville (132,000).

"The good news is that the core of the hurricane ... is not over the more populated areas," said Max Mayfield of the National Hurricane Center.

The path resembles that of 1980's Hurricane Allen, which packed winds of 185 mph and did \$55 million in property damage but killed only two people when it came ashore.

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MAX MAYFIELD
National Hurricane Center

Palm trees whipped as the wind strengthened in early afternoon and Corpus Christi Bay was covered with whitecaps as the storm came ashore.

As the storm hit, some people braved driving rain and rolling surf to walk on Corpus Christi beaches. A few even grabbed surfboards or swam.

Carolina DeLeon, 23, was on the beach with her husband, Jesus, making a videotape of the storm for their unborn daughter, Zara, who is due in two weeks.

"She'll probably say, 'Mom, you're crazy,'" Carolina DeLeon said.

Corpus Christi declared a state of disaster and called for a general but voluntary evacuation of the city of 300,000

residents, said city spokesman Ted Nelson.

The evacuation was "proceeding in an orderly fashion," Corpus Christi City Manager David Garcia said Sunday.

Emergency officials in San Antonio set up shelters at Lackland Air Force Base in anticipation of thousands of fleeing residents.

Texas hadn't been hit by a hurricane since Hurricane Jerry killed three people in October 1989. However, the state's 367-mile-long coast has been struck by tropical storms since then, including Charley, which dumped 18 inches of rain and killed 19 people in August 1998.

Airline crash kills two in Hong Kong

HONG KONG (AP) — A China Airlines jet burst into flames, flipped upside down and slid down the runway at Hong Kong's new airport Sunday while trying to land in a tropical storm, killing two people and injuring at least 206, officials said.

The jet's right wing dipped and struck the runway, breaking off as the airplane caught fire, officials told reporters. Witnesses said the jet was ablaze before it hit the ground — an account disputed by Hong Kong officials and China Airlines.

Flight CI642 from Bangkok, Thailand, was thrown off balance by "an overly hard side wind" as the pilot tried to land the MD-11 jet during Tropical Storm Sam, said Scott Shih, a spokesman for China Airlines at the carrier's headquarters in Taipei, Taiwan.

After the crash, the plane's body was intact and the landing gear pointed up into the night sky under huge spotlights set up by rescuers.

Passenger Joemy Tam described

a harrowing landing in the storm, which had earlier limited operations at Chek Lap Kok airport.

"The airplane tried to lift up, but somehow it couldn't," Tam told Radio Hong Kong. "On the right-hand side, the wing hit the ground and I saw the explosion, the fire, coming all the way from the front of the plane to the rear."

Tam said he freed himself, then helped the person next to him get loose. Stunned passengers, some of them burned, were screaming as they made their way out onto a runway drenched with jet fuel.

"I saw two ladies lying on the floor, actually lying on the ceiling," Tam said.

The victims were a Portuguese woman and a Taiwanese man, according to China Airlines vice president Chang Liang-hsi in Taipei. An official in Hong Kong said 101 of the 315 passengers and crew were uninjured. Four Americans were on the plane.

Expected rain may increase Turkey's plight

ISTANBUL, Turkey (AP) — Bulldozers and jackhammers tore into flattened buildings still entombing thousands of earthquake victims Sunday in Turkey, rushing to clear decomposing corpses before expected rains increase the risk of epidemics.

Just how many people remained buried across populous northwestern Turkey was still unknown nearly a week after Tuesday's enormous quake. The official death toll has surpassed 12,000, and some officials predicted as many as 40,000 may have died.

In many places, the search for the living was scaled back and there was only the roar of machinery ripping into the wreckage where rescuers once carefully listened for any signs of life.

Survivors, some with family members still buried, watched helplessly.

"We can't even get our dead," said Osman Bakay, who has two relatives still caught in a collapsed five-story building in Yalova, about 30 miles south of Istanbul.

The stench of decomposing bodies across the quake zone was an obvious reminder that serious diseases could flare any moment. Typhoid fever, cholera and dysentery topped the list of concerns. Officials have sprayed disinfectants, distributed water purification tablets and started spreading antiseptic lime in the region.

Rains forecast to begin Monday could bring contaminated runoff into streets. Rain also could contribute to other health risks — for example, carrying down toxins pumped into the sky from a huge fire at Turkey's biggest oil refinery after Tuesday's quake.

Health Minister Osman Durmus urged people to leave the area near the refinery in Izmit, about 90 miles southeast of Istanbul.

Up to 25,000 beds were available at hotels and resorts around the region, government officials said. Food, plastic sheeting and buses also were sent

in. Tent cities have been erected in some areas.

The government is desperate to reverse the widespread impression that it was unable to cope with the disaster.

Much criticism was focused on why Turkey's military — one of the region's largest with nearly 800,000 servicemen — appeared to hold off on a mass mobilization to dig for survivors and lead relief operations. More soldiers have been dispatched to the quake zone, but, it seemed, more to protect against looting than to provide help.

There was speculation in the Turkish media that the military response was complicated by the possibility of Turkey declaring martial law. That is a particularly sensitive issue in a nation that has experienced three military coups in the past 20 years. The government decided such a decree was unnecessary, said the military chief of staff Gen. Huseyin Kivrikoglu.

Kivrikoglu insisted more than 53,000 soldiers have been involved in efforts since hours after the quake struck and have pulled nearly 20,000 survivors from the rubble. Independent confirmation wasn't immediately available.

"We have the strength to overcome the damage of this earthquake very soon," Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit said in a nationwide address.

The patriotic message was carried even further by Durmus, the health minister. He said Turkish hospitals can handle all the injured and foreign help — including a U.S. military ship with a surgical team able to accommodate 500 patients — was not needed.

But there were no plans to call off the expected Monday arrival of the American assault ship USS Kearsarge, said military spokesman Lt. Cappy Surette. The ship was expected in the Golcuk area.

World and Nation

Datelines

■ Colorado Bid that would allow actively homosexual clergy rejected

DENVER (AP) — The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America on Saturday rejected a bid to scuttle its policy barring actively homosexual clergy.

The denomination will continue to permit homosexual pastors who agree to a celibate lifestyle.

The bill was submitted to a national assembly by the regional unit, or synod, covering northern California and Nevada.

Church members voted 820-159 to continue talking about the issue. A report from five denominational agencies said the 5.2-million member church should not shrink from "the sometimes disconcerting experience of looking anew at our inherited tradition."

■ Australia Independent republic vote could mean new coins

SYDNEY, Australia (AP) — Despite reports to the contrary, the government said Sunday it has no plans to remove the image of Queen Elizabeth II from its coins if Australia votes to become an independent republic in November.

Australia has been independent since 1901, but like many Commonwealth nations it still recognizes the British monarch as its head of state.

The nation's 11.6 million voters will be asked in a referendum on Nov. 6 whether they want to drop the queen, a holdover from Australia's day as a British colony, and become an independent republic.

News reports had said that becoming a republic would require the queen's head to be taken off Australia's coins and replaced with the image of notable public figures, such as cricket legend Sir Donald Bradman.

■ California First panda cub in nine years born in San Diego Zoo

SAN DIEGO (AP) — One of only three giant pandas in the United States gave birth to a cub Saturday.

Bai Yun, a 213-pound giant panda on loan from China, delivered the cub at 11:40 a.m. in a specially constructed den at the San Diego Zoo.

It was the first baby panda born in the Western Hemisphere since 1990, zoo officials said. "Everyone here is grinning from ear to ear over today's event," said Don Lindburg, of the zoo's giant panda team.

Scientists were unable to determine the cub's gender. The mother can be viewed only through a special camera that allows observers to catch glimpses of the cub as it is cradled in her huge paws.

■ Saudi Arabia King Fahd's eldest son, 54, dies of heart attack

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia (AP) — The eldest son of Saudi King Fahd has died of a heart attack, Saudi government officials said Saturday.

Prince Faisal bin Fahd, who was the equivalent of minister of sports, died in the intensive care unit of the King Faisal Specialist Hospital in Riyadh, the officials said. He was 54, the official Saudi Press Agency reported.

Prince Faisal was not in line to the throne. His uncle, Crown Prince Abdullah, is the heir.

Prince Faisal had been admitted to a hospital earlier Saturday with "severe heart problems," the officials said on condition of anonymity.

Daily Nebraskan

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