

NEWS DIGEST

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Eye of the storm nears land

MIAMI (AP) — Authorities urged nearly 2 million people to evacuate coastal areas stretching from Florida to North Carolina on Tuesday as Hurricane Floyd, one of the most powerful and biggest storms to ever threaten the United States, roared through the Bahamas.

Floyd's eye was expected to pass within 90 miles of southern Florida Tuesday, and perhaps come within 50 miles of north Florida's coast by this morning, before striking land somewhere farther north.

"If this thing parallels us, it could act like a weedeater going up the coast," said Craig Fugate of the Florida Emergency Operations Center in Tallahassee.

Floyd's top sustained wind eased today to 140 mph — down from Monday's 155 mph but still a Category 4 storm, the second most powerful designation for a hurricane.

Forecasters, however, said fluctuations in speed were expected. It would be Category 5 if wind speed reached 156 mph.

Floyd was most likely to make landfall in Georgia or the Carolinas, but "we're so close to the coast that just about any small deviation could bring the hurricane onshore anywhere from central Florida northward," hurricane specialist Miles

Lawrence said at the National Hurricane Center.

At Orlando, Walt Disney World was closing Tuesday for the first time because of weather. Universal Studios also was closing, and SeaWorld shut down.

Airlines canceled virtually all flights into and out of southern Florida, and the military sent aircraft inland and ships out of port to ride out the storm at sea. Crews of big civilian ships were told to get ready to leave port at Charleston, S.C.

The Marine Corps was moving 7,000 recruits out of its Recruit Depot at Parris Island, S.C.

Only a skeleton crew was left at NASA's Kennedy Space Center. Three space shuttles were in the shuttle hangar, which is designed to withstand wind of only up to 105 mph, and the fourth was in the Vehicle Assembly Building, built to withstand 125 mph wind. Four multimillion-dollar rockets stood exposed on launch pads.

Floyd was much larger than Hurricane Andrew — another Category 4 storm — which smashed into South Florida in 1992, causing \$25 billion in damage, killing 26 people and leaving 160,000 homeless.

South Carolina residents with memories of Hurricane Hugo 10 years ago packed up as best they could.

"How do you prepare for a storm that's going to wipe you out?" asked Buster Browne, a McClennanville, S.C., resident who rode out Hugo's Category 4 wind of 135 mph.

BUSTER BROWNE
South Carolina resident

"Category 1 or 2, you run out and buy plywood and do what you can," he said. "If a Category 5's going to hit you, what the hell are you going to do? Get the stuff you want to save, and leave town."

Only two Category 5 hurricanes have hit the United States since record-keeping started: the 1935 Labor Day storm that slammed the Florida Keys, killing 423 people, and Hurricane Camille, which killed 256 people in Mississippi and Virginia in 1969.

Mission looted after evacuation

DILI, Indonesia (AP) — Indonesian soldiers looted the abandoned U.N. mission in East Timor on Tuesday, just hours after 110 U.N. personnel and 1,300 East Timorese were evacuated and flown to safety to end a 10-day siege.

Office equipment and computers were carted away and vehicles were trashed by the soldiers — "the very people we asked to secure the compound when U.N. staff moved to the Australian consulate," U.N. spokesman Fred Eckhard said in New York.

There were reports Tuesday that the compound was also torched, but Eckhard said he was told that it was not the compound but a small house nearby that had been burned.

The remaining U.N. staff members, holed up in the Australian consulate, reported that a black plume of smoke was rising from the direction of the compound in the provincial capital of Dili, said Fernando del Mundo, spokesman for the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees in Jakarta. The staff feared their headquarters had been set ablaze by pro-Indonesia militiamen, he said.

The dozen U.N. personnel who stayed behind in Dili were to prepare the way for an international peacekeeping force, the makeup of which was being negotiated by Indonesian and U.N. officials Tuesday.

While it is impossible to confirm the number killed in the past week, previous estimates have ranged from 600 to 7,000.

In Jakarta, nearly 1,000 students tried to march on parliament Tuesday, demanding the resignation of President B.J. Habibie and the end of military involvement in politics — and blaming both for the bloodshed in East Timor.

Two students were wounded by plastic bullets after the crowd damaged two police cars and set fire to an army vehicle.

In New York, the U.N. Security Council and Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alata's worked Tuesday to resolve differences in the makeup of a peacekeeping force intended to halt the violence in East Timor.

The Atlanta-based Carter Center, which monitors international political crises, said militiamen, continue to terrorize and kill refugees in camps set up in West Timor.

Lawyer removed from investigation

■ More removals by Justice officials may follow in Waco case.

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department has removed the federal prosecutor who first raised concerns about a cover-up at Waco from further involvement in the case, saying he and his colleagues are potential witnesses in the independent inquiry into the government siege.

Justice officials said there could be additional removals of lawyers involved in the case, including some who are helping to defend the government against civil suits brought by the Branch Davidians.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Bill Johnston, who helped handle the criminal prosecution of Branch Davidian survivors, was removed Friday from the Waco case along with his boss, U.S. Attorney James W. Blagg, according to court documents made public Tuesday.

"I'm not sure what to make of it. I'm trying not to be paranoid," Johnston said, adding that he hasn't been involved lately in court developments related to the Branch Davidian case.

Special Waco counsel John Danforth, is beginning his investigation into whether the government killed any Branch Davidians during the 1993 siege and tried to cover it up.

The removal of Johnston came to light less than 24 hours after the public release of a letter he had sent to Attorney General Janet Reno.

"I have formed the belief that facts may have been kept from you — and quite possibly are being kept from you even now — by components of the department," Johnston wrote Aug. 30.

It has been revealed that the FBI used potentially incendiary tear gas during the last day of the siege. Government officials maintain that Branch Davidians set the fire on April 19, 1993, when David Koresh and about 80 followers perished.

Al Gore holds rally to court Latino activists

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vice President Al Gore bounded on stage Tuesday to the hot-salsa sounds of Ricky Martin while aides passed around a 15-page list of 521 Latino activists endorsing Gore's presidential campaign.

"Lo acepto," Gore grinned. "I accept."

The pep rally was staged as a formal launch to Gore's effort to build a groundswell of support in the exploding Hispanic community.

The vice president made the most of his Spanish as he embraced supporters beneath the banner, "Ganamos con Gore" — We win with Gore — at the same Capitol Hill hotel where the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute was holding its annual convention.

The Democratic presidential candidate talked of a "kinship" with Latinos. "We have had successes

together. We have had the same enemies," Gore said.

Citing the community's disproportionately high school dropout rates and problems getting health care, Gore repeated the refrain, "I'm not satisfied. Nuestras familias merecen lo mejor. (Our families deserve better.)"

Campaign aides boasted "over 700" Latino elected officials and other prominent community leaders on Gore's endorsement list, but a precise counting tallied 521.

His Republican rival, Texas Gov. George W. Bush, has also fiercely courted Latinos.

New census data released Tuesday showed the Hispanic population grew by more than 35 percent to about 30.3 million between 1990 and 1998, increasing its share of the total population from 9 percent to 11 percent.

World and Nation Datelines

■ Iowa

Bush: Court wrong in ending ban on gays in Boy Scouts

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Questioned by an anti-gay rights publication, Texas Gov. George W. Bush said Tuesday that he opposes gay marriages and that a court erred in striking a ban on gays in the Boy Scouts.

Publishers of the newsletter said Bush's comments were "a good start" but said they had more questions about the Republican presidential front-runner's position on gay rights.

Bill Horn is a leading anti-gay rights activist who publishes a newsletter called "Straight from the Heart." He's been questioning presidential campaigns about their views on gay issues.

■ New Jersey

Miss America pageant holds off on widening standards

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. (AP) — The head of the Miss America pageant on Tuesday backed off plans to allow women who've been divorced or pregnant to compete for the title, saying no final decision has been made.

Robert L. Beck, CEO of the Miss America Organization, said the pageant's board of directors has agreed to hold off implementing the changes pending talks with state pageant operators.

The Associated Press reported Monday that the pageant had decided to break with nearly 50 years of tradition by striking provisions in the contestant contracts that require women to swear they have never been married and never been pregnant.

■ San Francisco

Circuit court tells judge to rethink absolute drug ban

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — The dark judicial clouds hovering over California's medical marijuana clubs may have lightened — but only just a bit.

On Monday, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals told a federal judge to rethink his absolute ban on drug distribution at some northern California marijuana clubs and consider an exemption for patients who show a serious medical need and no legal alternative.

Though not as broad, the court's language was consistent with a 1996 California initiative allowing patients with a doctor's recommendation to possess and use marijuana for serious illnesses without prosecution under state law.

■ Yugoslavia

Serbs fired upon returning to homes in Kosovo

PRISTINA, Yugoslavia (AP) — Gunmen fired on a convoy of Serbs returning to their homes in the American sector of Kosovo, killing one and wounding others, NATO said Tuesday.

Two Montenegrin women — aged 50 and 70 years — were found dead Monday in their home in the western city of Pec, the NATO command said without releasing further details.

In Moscow, meanwhile, a senior Russian general said Tuesday that Russia may reconsider its participation in Kosovo's peacekeeping operations because NATO and the United Nations are moving the province away from Yugoslav control. Belgrade still retains nominal sovereignty over Kosovo.

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