

Hurricane threatens some of South's most storied cities

ST. AUGUSTINE, Fla. (AP) — Hurricane Matthew spared Florida's most heavily populated stretch from a catastrophic blow Friday but threatened some of the South's most historic and picturesque cities with ruinous flooding and wind damage as it pushed its way up the coastline.

Among the cities in the cross-hairs were St. Augustine, Florida; Savannah, Georgia; and Charleston, South Carolina.

"There are houses that will probably not ever be the same again or not even be there," St. Augustine Mayor Nancy Shaver lamented as battleship-gray floodwaters coursed through the streets of the 451-year-old city founded by the Spanish.

Matthew — the most powerful hurricane to threaten the Atlantic Seaboard in over a decade — set off alarm as it closed in on the U.S., having left more than 300 people dead in Haiti.

In the end, it sideswiped Florida's Atlantic coast early Friday, swamping streets, toppling trees onto homes and knocking out power to more than 1 million people. But it stayed just far enough offshore to prevent major damage to cities like Miami, Fort Lauderdale and West Palm Beach. And the coast never felt the full force of its 120 mph winds.

"It looks like we've dodged a bullet," said Rep. Patrick Murphy, a Democrat whose district includes Martin County, just north of West Palm Beach.

At least four people died in Florida. An elderly St. Lucie County couple died from carbon monoxide fumes while running a generator in their garage and two women were killed in separate events when trees fell on a home and a camper.

While the hurricane was weakening quickly, several northeastern Florida cities, including Jackson-



An official vehicle navigates debris as it passes along Highway A1A after it was partially washed away by Hurricane Matthew, Friday in Flagler Beach, Fla.

ville, were still in harm's way, along with communities farther up the coast. Authorities warned that not only could Matthew easily turn toward land, it could also cause deadly flooding with its surge of seawater.

The storm gouged out several

large sections of the coastal A1A highway north of Daytona Beach, and had nearly completely washed out the northbound lane for about a mile at Flagler Beach.

"It's pretty bad, it's jagged all over the place," said Oliver Shields, whose two-story house is within

sight of the highway.

About 500,000 people were under evacuation orders in the Jacksonville area, along with another half-million on the Georgia coast. More than 300,000 fled their homes in South Carolina. The latest forecast showed the storm could also scrape the North Carolina coast.

"If you're hoping it's just going to pass far enough offshore that this isn't a problem anymore — that is a very, very big mistake that you could make that could cost you your life," National Hurricane Center Director Rick Knabb warned.

St. Augustine, which is the nation's oldest permanently occupied European settlement and includes a 17th-century Spanish fortress and many historic homes turned into bed-and-breakfasts, was awash in rain and seawater that authorities said could top 8 feet.

"It's a really serious devastating situation," the mayor of the city of 14,000 said. "The flooding is just going to get higher and higher and higher."

Historic downtown Charleston, usually bustling with tourists who flock to see the city's beautifully maintained antebellum homes, was eerily quiet, with many stores and shops boarded up with plywood and protected by stacks of sandbags.

The city announced a midnight-to-6 a.m. curfew Saturday, around the time the coast was expected to take the brunt of the storm.

Matthew's outer bands began lashing Savannah, a city that was settled in 1733 and has a handsome historic district of moss-draped trees, brick and cobblestone streets, Greek revival mansions and other 18th- and 19th-century homes.

Matthew was expected to bring winds of 50 to 60 mph that could snap branches from the burly live oaks and damage the historic

homes. And 8 to 14 inches of rain could bring some street flooding.

Savannah-Chatham County Police Chief Jack Lumpkin said officers will enforce a dusk-until-dawn curfew.

A small crew of workers Thursday set out to button up the Owens-Thomas house, one of Savannah's architectural gems. The 1819 Greek revival mansion serves as a museum.

Sonja Wallen, a curator, said antique rugs and furniture were moved away from the home's more than 40 windows, many of them still with their original glass. Windows were fitted with plywood and other coverings, while sandbags were stacked at the basement entrance.

"It's basically a lot of little details — sandbags and duct tape around doorways where water can get in," Wallen said. "It's pretty much the same stuff you would do for any home."

Some of Georgia's resort islands were expected to take the brunt of Matthew's storm surge, including St. Simons and Tybee.

On Tybee Island, where most of the 3,000 residents were evacuated, Jeff Dickey held out hope that the storm might shift and spare his home. But as the rain picked up, he decided staying wasn't worth the risk.

"We kind of tried to wait to see if it will tilt more to the east," Dickey said. "But it's go time."

Mayor Jason Buelterman personally called some of the holdouts, hoping to persuade them to move inland.

"This is what happens when you don't have a hurricane for 100 years," he said. "People get complacent."

Airlines canceled at least 5,000 flights Wednesday through Saturday, including many in and out of Orlando.

BRIEFLY

Russia faces Syria showdown

MOSCOW (AP) — International diplomatic pressure increased on Moscow Friday to end the joint Russian-Syrian siege of the city of Aleppo, but Moscow's U.N. ambassador says he will most likely veto a Security Council resolution that would ground Russian warplanes.

Russia's parliament meanwhile ratified a treaty with Syria that allows its troops to stay indefinitely in the country, a show of support for embattled Syrian President Bashar Assad.

The siege by Syrian forces backed by Russian warplanes has inflicted immense suffering on civilians in the city's rebel-held eastern districts. A cease-fire brokered by the United States and Russia collapsed last month and Washington-Moscow ties have deteriorated sharply; Russian lawmakers said ratifying the treaty with Syria on Friday was a necessary step to stand up to the U.S.

The United States and Russia support opposite sides in the war — Moscow has been a staunch Assad ally and Washington backs

rebels trying to oust him.

As Aleppo's misery dragged on, Russia's United Nations ambassador Vitaly Churkin rejected a French-proposed Security Council resolution that would call for grounding all aircraft, including Russia's, over Aleppo.

Russia's air campaign in Syria, launched a year ago, has reversed the tide of war and helped Assad's forces regain some key ground. Moscow says the goal of its military operation is to assist the Syrian army in the fight against terrorism. It rejects accusations of targeting civilians.

U.N. criticism of Trump draws Russian complaint

GENEVA (AP) — Russia lodged a formal complaint last month with the United Nations over a top U.N. official's condemnations of Donald Trump and some European politicians, an intervention that underscores the unusual links between

the Republican presidential nominee and the Kremlin.

There is no evidence Trump sought Russia's assistance, or was even aware of the criticism by Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein, the U.N. high commissioner for human rights.

Vitaly Churkin, Russia's ambassador to the United Nations, told The Associated Press on Friday that he complained to U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon about Zeid's remarks.

Three diplomats familiar with the conversation said the complaint occurred in a private meeting Sept. 13. Churkin angrily protested a pair of speeches by Zeid that denounced "demagogues" and specifically targeted Trump and several populist leaders in Europe, even likening their tactics to Islamic State propaganda.

"Prince Zeid is overstepping his limits from time to time and we're unhappy about it," Churkin said Friday. "He criticized a number of heads of state, government. He should stick

to his file, which is important enough."

In a speech in Cleveland three months before Republicans gathered there to nominate Trump, Zeid said: "In what may be a crucial election for leadership of this country later this year, we have seen a full-frontal attack — disguised as courageous taboo-busting — on some fundamental, hard-won tenets of decency and social

cohesion that have come to be accepted by American society."

"Less than 150 miles away from where I speak, a front-running candidate to be president of this country declared, just a few months ago, his enthusiastic support for torture," said Zeid, a Jordanian royal, referencing a speech Trump gave in Ohio in November promising to restore waterboarding and introduce

even harsher interrogation methods for suspected terrorists.

The Kremlin has said it has no position on the U.S. election. Its officials regularly oppose the U.N. interfering in what it considers the internal politics of sovereign nations.

Still, Churkin's personal intervention could add to questions about the relationship between Trump and Russia.

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