

Hurricane Irma bears down on Caribbean

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — Wielding the most powerful winds ever recorded for a storm in the Atlantic Ocean, Hurricane Irma bore down Tuesday on the Leeward Islands of the northeast Caribbean on a forecast path that could take it toward Florida over the weekend.

The storm, a dangerous Category 5, posed an immediate threat to the small islands of the northern Leewards, including Antigua and Barbuda, as well as the British and U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

“The Leeward Islands are going to get destroyed,” warned Colorado State University meteorology professor Phil Klotzbach, a noted hurricane expert. “I just pray that this thing wobbles and misses them. This is a serious storm.”

Irma had maximum sustained winds of 185 mph in late afternoon as it approached the Caribbean from the east, according to the U.S. National Hurricane Center in Miami.

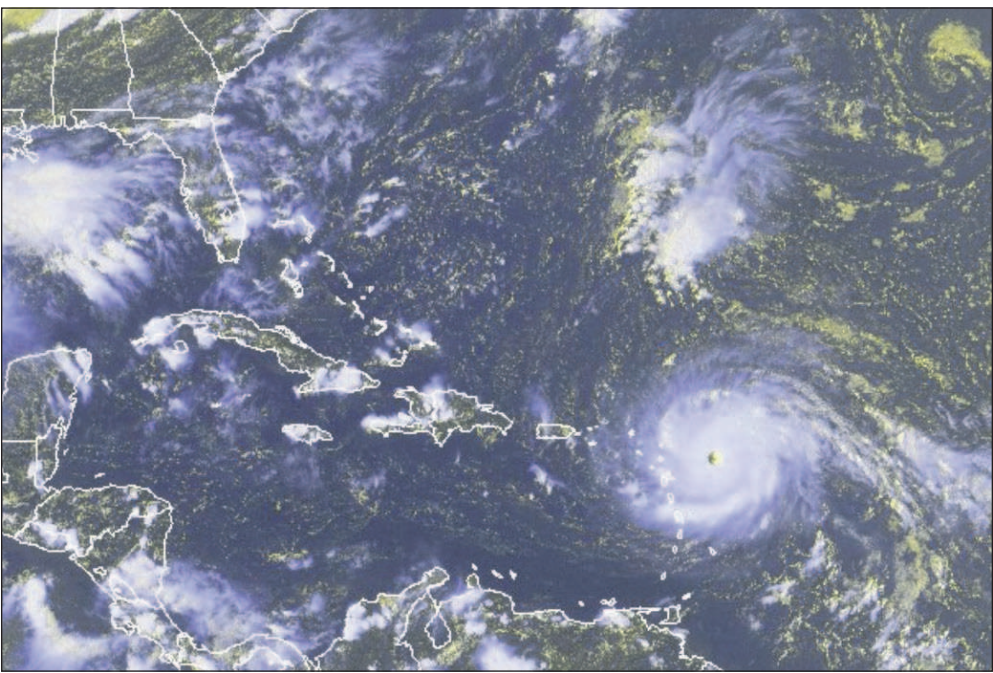
Four other storms have had winds that strong in the overall Atlantic region but they were in the Caribbean Sea or the Gulf of Mexico, which are usually home to warmer waters that fuel cyclones. Hurricane Allen hit 190 mph in 1980, while 2005’s Wilma, 1988’s Gilbert and a 1935 great Florida Key storm all had 185 mph winds

Two Houstons emerge from Harvey: one wet, one dry

HOUSTON (AP) — In a quest to help Harvey victims, Kelli Shofstall and her son set out on a 165-mile drive from Austin to Houston that led them through neighborhood after neighborhood where the streets were dry and no one seemed to need assistance.

It took more than a day of driving around, following outdated flood maps, before they found a water-filled road where they could ferry tenants to and from a marooned apartment complex using an inflatable yellow raft.

“My son and I joked that we sucked at relief efforts,” Shofstall said. Christian Carr, 17, waded in his jeans into knee-deep water pulling the raft to see if anyone else



In this GOES-East satellite image taken Tuesday and released by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Hurricane Irma, a potentially catastrophic category 5 hurricane, moves westward toward the Leeward Islands.

wanted to float out of the Heights Park Row apartments.

More than a week after Harvey swamped the greater Houston area, the metropolis is divided into two cities: one still covered with water and flood debris, the other largely unblemished by the storm.

Some subdivisions remain submerged, and many streets are piled high with ruined belongings. More than 10 percent of the county’s dwellings were flooded, and several prominent theater and concert halls were damaged, though major sports stadiums escaped unharmed.

In unscathed areas, the only reminder of high water may be a layer of silt on the streets, damp curbs or the mildew-like whiff of disaster.

On a leafy street corner in the city’s Montrose section, a group of children set up a Labor Day lemonade stand in a neighborhood that generally has nothing worse than standing water for a week after heavy rain. Even after Harvey, homes were not damaged and streets drained quickly.

Congress to speed up Harvey aid, tackle debt limit

WASHINGTON (AP) — Lawmakers returned to Washington Tuesday facing a daunting to-do list and three months left in the year to show that Republicans can actually get things done. President Donald Trump immediately added a huge complication by rescinding immigration protections for younger immigrants and ordering Congress to come up with a fix.

The immigration issue has defeated Congress’ best efforts in the past and proven enormously divisive for the GOP. But for now there’s not even room for it on the front burner as lawmakers, just back from a five-week summer recess, face a series of more immediate tasks.

First up: Speeding relief aid to Texas and Louisiana in the wake of the Harvey storm. A first \$7.9 billion installment was set for House passage on Wednesday, with leaders hoping for a big bipartisan vote to demonstrate Congress’ support for

Harvey’s victims.

That will be the easy part.

GOP leaders are also wrestling with how to raise the government’s \$19.9 trillion debt limit, something that must happen by month’s end, at the latest, to avoid a first-ever default on U.S. payments. The administration and GOP leaders were making plans to add the debt limit increase to the Harvey relief bill in the Senate and send it back to the House, a plan that quickly provoked conservative ire and a familiar intramural GOP dispute.

UN chief says natural disasters have quadrupled since 1970

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Natural disasters have nearly quadrupled in number since 1970 and the United States has experienced the most disasters since 1995, followed by China and India, the United Nations chief said Tuesday.

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told reporters that in recent days the world has seen the “dramatic aggravation” of climate change with “unprecedented events” caused by storms and flooding from Texas to Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sierra Leone.

Before the current floods, he said, preliminary reports registered 2,087 deaths this year from natural disasters. With the latest floods, that number will at least double.

In the last two months, more than 1,000 people have been killed in flooding events across India, southern Nepal and northern Bangladesh and some 40 million have seen their homes, businesses or crops destroyed. Last month, more than 1,000 people died from a mudslide and flood that hit Sierra Leone’s capital Freetown. And last week, Hurricane Harvey dumped almost a year’s worth of rainfall on Houston.

Guterres said last year 24.2 million people were displaced by sudden disasters — “three times as many as by conflict and violence.”

He noted that scientists caution about linking any single weather event with climate change. “But they are equally clear that such extreme weather is precisely what their models predict will be the new normal of a warming world,” Guterres said.

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