

CARIBBEAN SLAMMED BY STORM

Could reach Category 5 and threaten Texas



Shoppers in Kingston, Jamaica, swarm supermarket for last-minute supplies as Hurricane Dean churned toward the island. Photo by Reuters

BY BALFORD HENRY
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DAILY NEWS WRITERS

PANICKED TOURISTS jammed airports at Caribbean resorts and island residents stripped store shelves of staples yesterday as Hurricane Dean and its ferocious 145 mph winds bore down on Jamaica and the Cayman Islands.

The massive Category 4 storm, which is already being blamed for at least six deaths, was passing to the south of the Dominican Republic and Haiti last night. Forecasters said anywhere between 4 and 10 inches of rain could fall there, possibly triggering flash floods and mudslides.

Islanders bought out stores as they scrambled to stock up on emergency supplies before the

storm hit. In Jamaica, shoppers stacked their carts with water, canned food, flashlights, batteries and kerosene.

"[I'm] not taking any chance. I am making sure I have food, water and oil at home," said Andrea Thomas, who was stocking up at a crowded MegaMart store outside the capital, Kingston. As the Atlantic season's first hurricane churned closer, frightened tourists cut short their vacations and headed to the airports, trying to get out before flights were canceled.

"If we don't manage to leave we'll go back to the hotel and barricade the hotel room and then hope and pray," Dutch tourist Gideon Tuttezs said as he waited in a standby line to fly out of Montego Bay, Jamaica.

Jamaica's government urged

people to flee low-lying and landslide-prone areas, buses were marshaled to transport evacuees, and police and troops were put on alert.

But many people refused to leave, preferring to stick it out at home rather than go to shelters.

"It always floods whether it is rain or hurricane, but I have lived here all my life," said Lorraine Spence, 20, a resident of rural Nightingale Grove.

Cuba was also bracing for the approaching storm, and in Mexico, many residents and tourists were ordered to leave their residences for higher ground.

In the Dominican Republic, Dean's pounding waves were blamed for the death yesterday of a boy swept out to sea.

On Friday, a man drowned on St. Lucia, while a woman and her 7-year-old son were killed by a landslide in Dominica. Two people also died on the French island of Martinique.

Dean was expected to strike Jamaica today before heading to the Gulf of Mexico and the Yucatan Peninsula and possibly reaching Texas, according to the National Hurricane Center.

Experts predicted the storm would intensify and become a rare Category 5 tempest — the maximum hurricane level — with sustained winds of more than 155 mph.

Hurricane Katrina was a Category 3 storm when it struck New Orleans.

"The Category 5 winds we're expecting later this weekend will cause complete devastation," said National Hurricane Center meteorologist Bobbie Berg.

As Dean plowed west at 17 mph, hurricane-force winds extended 60 miles out from the center of the storm, with tropical-storm-force winds reaching up to 205 miles outward.

The wrath of Dean was even felt in space, where Endeavour astronauts scaled back their last spacewalk yesterday and planned to land the space shuttle Tuesday, a day early, NASA said.

Texans also prepared for the coming onslaught after forecasters warned that if the storm remains on its current track, it will reach just north of Brownsville on the Gulf of Mexico.

President Bush, who has been harshly criticized for his response to Katrina, signed a pre-landfall disaster declaration, allowing the federal government to move in people, equipment and supplies immediately in case Hurricane Dean hits the state.

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WHERE TITAN STORMS GROW

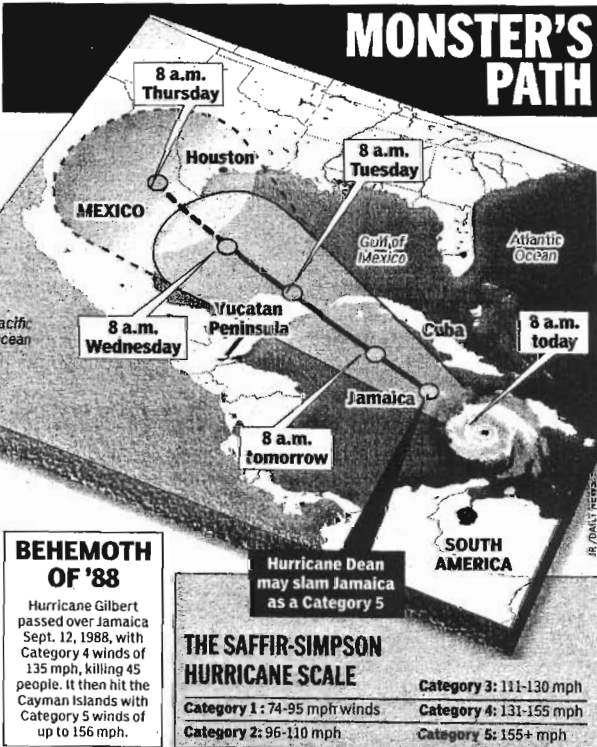
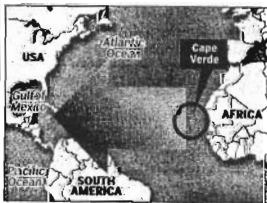
HURRICANE DEAN was spawned in an area known for producing some of the most deadly storms — the Cape Verde Islands off the west coast of Africa.

These titans travel westward across the Atlantic Ocean gathering speed and strength as they barrel toward the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico.

Hurricane season runs from June to November, but these huge storms develop between August and October when the Atlantic is warmer and winds are more favorable.

"Most of these storms come from tropical waves, they move over Africa, hit the warm waters of the Atlantic and move west of the Cape Verdes," said National Hurricane Center meteorologist Bobbie Berg.

There are normally about two Cape Verde-type hurricanes each year.
Christina Boyle



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