

Deadly 'cane rolls on to islands

CASTRIES, St. Lucia — Hurricane Dean roared into the eastern Caribbean yesterday, tearing away roofs, flooding streets and causing at least three deaths on small islands.

By midevening, the Atlantic season's first hurricane had strengthened into a Category 4 storm — the second-highest level — with sustained winds of 135 mph after crossing over the warm waters of the Caribbean.

Forecasters warned it could grow into a monster with 150 mph winds before steering next week into the Gulf of Mexico, with its 4,000 oil and gas platforms.

Dean could threaten the United States by Wednesday, forecasters said, and Texas Gov. Rick Perry's office suggested people get ready.

On tiny St. Lucia, fierce winds tore corrugated metal roofs from dozens of houses and a hospital's pediatric ward, whose patients had been evacuated hours earlier. Police said a 62-year-old man drowned when he tried to retrieve a cow from a rain-swollen river.

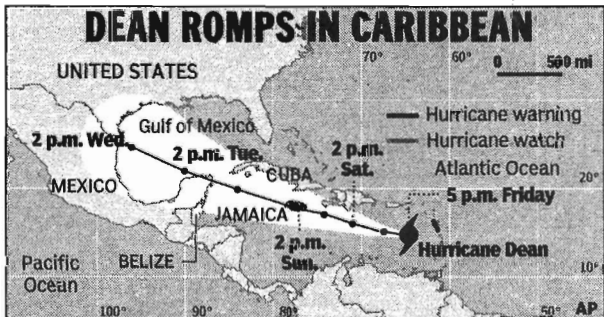
The government of Dominica reported that a woman and her 7-year-old son died when a hillside soaked by Dean's rains gave way and crushed the house where they were sleeping.

French authorities on the nearby is-

land of Martinique said a 90-year-old man had died of a heart attack during the storm, but it was unclear whether the hurricane was a factor.

Dean was forecast to brush the southern coast of Haiti late today, then hit Jamaica tomorrow before clipping Mexico's Yucatan peninsula two days later.

Jamaican officials said Kingston's national arena will serve as one of several shelters, and they drafted a plan to move



innates at two maximum-security prisons if needed. Evacuation plans, especially for the flood-prone eastern region, were finalized, said Prime Minister Portia Simpson-Miller.

About a dozen cruise ships were altering their itineraries to avoid the hurricane and its aftermath, according to cruise critic.com, a Web site devoted to cruise travel information.

The Associated Press