

Dean barrels toward Yucatan

■ Hurricane packing 160-mph winds takes aim at Mayan ruins, resorts and oil rigs on path to central Mexico

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TULUM, Mexico — Hurricane Dean strengthened into a monster Category 5 storm last night as its first rain and winds began slamming the coasts of Mexico and Belize. Thousands of tourists fled the beaches of the Mayan Riviera as it roared toward the ancient ruins and modern oil installations of the Yucatan Peninsula.

"It's as bad as it gets," meteorologist Dennis Feltgen told The Washington Post from the National Hurricane Center in Miami.

Mexico's state oil company, Petroleos de Mexico, said it was evacuating all of its more than 14,000 offshore workers in the southern Gulf of Mexico, including the giant Cantarell oil field.

By mid-evening, the system had sustained winds of 160 mph and was centered about 210 miles south-southeast of Tulum, according to the National Hurricane Center. The eye was expected to strike the Yucatan region early today. Category 5 storms — capable of catastrophic damage — are rare, with only three having hit the United States since record-keeping began.

Cancun seemed likely to be spared a direct hit, but visitors abandoned its swank hotels to swarm outbound flights. Officials evacuated more rustic lodgings farther south, where Dean — which has killed at least 12 people across the Caribbean — was expected to smash ashore.

A hurricane warning was in effect from Cancun all the way south through Belize. All hospitals were closed in Belize City, the country's biggest, and authorities urged its residents to leave. A storm surge of 12 to 18 feet was possible at the storm's center.

The storm was expected to slash across the Yucatan and emerge in the Gulf of Campeche, where Petroleos de Mexico de-



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Hurricane Dean, a monster Category 5, churning westward across the Caribbean yesterday.

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ecided to shut down production on offshore rigs that extract most of the nation's oil. Shutting the 407 oil wells in the Campeche Sound amounts to a production loss of 2.7 million barrels of oil and 2.6 billion cubic feet of natural gas a day, Pemex said. Of that, about 1.7 million barrels of oil a day is exported.

President Felipe Calderón

said he would cut short a trip to Canada where he was meeting with President George W. Bush and Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

Central Mexico was next on the storm's path, though the outer bands were likely to bring rain, flooding and gusty winds to already saturated south Texas.

At the state's southern tip, offi-

cialists urged residents to evacuate ahead of the storm. "Our mission is very simple. It's to get people out of the kill zone, to get people out of the danger area, which is the coastline of Texas," said Johnny Cavazos, Cameron County's chief emergency director.

Officials in the resort town of South Padre Island distributed sandbags after a state of emergency was declared.

In Mexico, the Quintana Roo state government said about two-thirds of the 60,000 tourists in the Cancun area had left. Some camped overnight at the city's airport to ensure a flight out. Many others were turned away.

Hurricane Dean's projected path

