

Hurricane weakens after battering Texas

REUTERS, Texas

The most powerful hurricane to hit the US state of Texas in more than 50 years moved slowly inland yesterday, dumping torrential rain expected to cause catastrophic flooding after battering the coast with 130 miles per hour winds. Texas utility companies said nearly a quarter of a million customers were without power. Residents and emergency responders were still sheltering from the storm early on Saturday, making it difficult to gauge the full extent of the damage.

The town of Rockport, 30 miles (48 km) north of the city of Corpus Christi, appeared to be one of the hardest hit. Ahead of the storm's arrival, the city's mayor told anyone staying behind to write their names on their arms for identification purposes in case of death or injury. The hurricane came ashore northeast of the city of Corpus Christi late on Friday with maximum winds of 130 miles per hour (209 km per hour). That made it a Category 4 storm on the Saffir-Simpson scale, the second-highest category and the most powerful storm in over a decade to hit the mainland United States.

The storm weakened to Category 1 early yesterday and was expected to be downgraded to a tropical storm later in the day, the US National Hurricane Center said. Harvey was about 125 miles (201 km) southwest of Houston, moving at about six mph (10 km per hour), the center said.

Harvey was expected to linger for days over Texas and bring as much as 40 inches (101.6 cm) of rain to some parts of the state. Harvey was the first major hurricane of Category 3 or more to hit the mainland United States since Hurricane Wilma struck Florida in 2005.



This undated photo released by North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) yesterday shows rockets being launched by Korean People's Army (KPA) personnel during a target strike exercise at an undisclosed location in North Korea. PHOTO: AFP

KNIFE ATTACKS IN BRUSSELS AND LONDON

Police probing terror acts

AFP, Brussels

Police in Belgium and Britain were yesterday investigating two attempted knife attacks on security forces by assailants who allegedly shouted "Allahu akbar" before being stopped.

One attacker in Brussels, who wounded a soldier on Friday in what authorities said was an "attempted terrorist murder", was shot dead, while police in London overpowered a man who drove up to police outside Buckingham Palace in possession of a "four-foot sword".

The two incidents come as much of Europe is on high alert following a string of major attacks over the past two years -- most of which have been claimed by, or blamed on, jihadists.

Last week, Spain was hit by twin vehicle attacks which left 15 dead, and another two people were killed in a stabbing spree in Finland.

Belgian prosecutors said the attacker yelled "Allahu akbar" (God is greatest) during the assault before being shot by a soldier in the centre of city, which has been on high alert since last year's carnage at the airport and on the metro.

One of the soldiers was slightly hurt in the attack which Mayor Philippe Close said had been carried out by a "lone individual".

Overnight, police raided the suspect's home in Bruges, northwest Belgium, a statement said.

During the attack near the Grand Place in central Brussels

at 8:00 pm (1800 GMT), the man rushed at several soldiers from behind and struck them with a knife, prompting one of them to open fire.

"The man was hit and died shortly afterwards in hospital from his wounds," the prosecutors' statement said. As well as the knife, police found a replica gun and two copies of the Koran on him.

The assailant was a Belgian national of Somali origin who was born in 1987, authorities confirmed. He arrived in the country in 2004 and was granted Belgian nationality in 2015.

Although not known for any terror-related activities, he had an assault and battery charge on his record from February, the statement said.

Less than two hours later, three British police officers were slightly injured while arresting a man in a car outside Buckingham Palace in London.

The attacker, who had "repeatedly shouted Allahu akbar", reached for a "four-foot sword" and had to be incapacitated with CS gas, police said on Saturday.

The 26-year-old attacker from Luton, a city 30 miles (50 kilometres) north of London, was arrested under the Terrorism Act 2000.

With much of Europe on edge over the attacks, many of them "low-tech" assaults using knives or vehicles as weapons, thousands of people were expected to take to the streets of Barcelona on Saturday evening in a defiant march under the slogan "No tinc por" -- Catalan for "not afraid".

Man with knife shot dead after stabbing soldier in Brussels Buckingham Palace attacker had '4-foot sword', shouted 'Allahu akbar'

N Korea fires three short-range missiles

AFP, Seoul

North Korea fired three short-range ballistic missiles yesterday, the US military said, reviving tensions with Washington after President Donald Trump had said Pyongyang was starting to show some "respect".

The launches come as tens of thousands of South Korean and US troops take part in joint military drills in the south of the peninsula, which the North views as highly provocative.

Following an initial US assessment saying that two of the missiles had "failed in flight", a spokesman for the US Pacific Command later said the two weapons had not failed but "flew approximately 250 kilometres (155 miles) in a northeastern direction".

One of the three missiles blew up "almost immediately", with none of the weapons posing a threat to either North America or the US territory of Guam, the spokesman said.

Lee Il-Woo, an analyst at Korea Defence Network, said the launches represented a "low-level provocative act" carried out in response to the US-South Korea exercises, which are seen by Pyongyang as a rehearsal for an invasion of its own territory.

The joint exercises started Monday at a time of heightened tensions between Pyongyang and Washington, after two successful intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) launches carried out by North Korea last month apparently brought most of the United States into range for the first time.

The launches, which took place over a span of 30 minutes, came as North Korean state media reported that leader Kim Jong-Un oversaw a military exercise simulating a special forces assault on South Korean border islands involving aircraft, "multiple-missile launchers" and howitzers.

Fugitive Thai ex-PM in Dubai, aiming for UK

Says junta source

AFP, Bangkok

Fugitive former Thai premier Yingluck Shinawatra fled to Dubai and may try to seek asylum in the UK, a junta source told AFP yesterday, after she ducked a legal ruling, wrong-footing the court and her supporters alike.

Yingluck, 50, was due on Friday morning to arrive at the Supreme Court for the ruling in her trial for criminal negligence that could have seen her jailed for 10 years.

But she did not show up, staging a vanishing act that wrote a dramatic closing chapter to the 16-year political saga of her mega-rich Shinawatra family.

Speculation swirled yesterday on the whereabouts of Thailand's first female prime minister -- and her possible escape route.

The junta source, who is well-placed in the security hierarchy, gave a detailed



description of her escape, saying she took a private jet from Thailand to Singapore and onto Dubai, the base of Shinawatra family patriarch Thaksin, who is Yingluck's older brother.

"Thaksin has long prepared escape plan for his sister... he would not allow his sister to spend even a single day in prison," the source added, requesting anonymity.

"But Dubai is not Yingluck's final destination," the source said, adding she may be aiming "to claim asylum in Britain".

Thaksin, who once owned Manchester City football club, owns property in London and spends significant amounts of time in the city.

Iraq recaptures Tal Afar centre, citadel from IS

AFP, Tal Afar

Iraqi forces yesterday announced the ouster of Islamic State group jihadists from central Tal Afar and its historic citadel, leaving them poised to fully recapture one of the last IS urban strongholds in the country.

The advance, less than a week into an assault on the strategic city, comes after Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declared victory in July over the jihadists in Iraq's second city Mosul, where IS declared its "caliphate" in 2014.

It came on the day of a visit to Baghdad by the French foreign and defence ministers during which a loan of \$512 million was announced to help the Iraqi economy in the face of low oil prices and the cost of battling the jihadists.

"Units of the Counter-Terrorism Service liberated the Citadel and Basatin districts and raised the Iraqi flag on top of the cita-

del," operation commander General Abdulmir Yarahall.

The CTS and federal police units also seized three northern districts and the Al-Rabia neighbourhood west of the citadel, after retaking the district of Al-Taliaa to the south on Friday.

On Saturday, they battled IS jihadists around Al-Ayadi, 15 kilometres (10 miles) north of Tal Afar and strategically located on the road between the city and the Syrian border, said Yarahall.

Columns of smoke could be seen rising over the city after the Hashed al-Shaabi paramilitary coalition fighting alongside government troops seized the Al-Khadra and Al-Jazeera districts.

Tal Afar sits on a strategic route between IS-controlled territories in Syria and Mosul, 70 kilometres further east. Officials have said the capture of the city would make it even more difficult for the jihadists to transport fighters and weapons between Iraq and Syria.



Indian paramilitary forces and police march in Jalandhar, Punjab yesterday. Security in Haryana and Punjab has been beefed up after followers of controversial guru Ram Rahim Singh went on a rampage after their spiritual leader was convicted of rape. At least 32 people were killed in the violence. PHOTO: AFP

Kabul Shia mosque attack toll hits 28

AFP, Kabul

Hundreds of Shia mourners yesterday buried victims of a suicide bomb and gun attack on a mosque in Kabul as the death toll from the atrocity rose to 28.

Distraught relatives and friends carried coffins into the cemetery one by one, a day after the latest deadly attack claimed by the Islamic State group on Afghanistan's reeling minority Shiite community.

Four attackers setting of explosions and firing gun shots laid siege to the Emam Zaman mosque in the north of Afghanistan's capital for four hours as dozens of men, women, and children gathered for Friday prayers.

Some 50 people were also wounded in the attack which again underlined Afghanistan's deteriorating security situation while more than 100 worshippers were rescued when security forces stormed the building.

In scenes that have become all too depressingly familiar for Shias in the war-torn country recently, wailing mourners gathered at the mosque yesterday to lay the bodies of the dead side by side in graves.

"We used to attend ceremonies such as Ashura together in this mosque, but today I am burying their bodies here," Hussain Ali, who lost a friend in the attack, told AFP.

"This is not the first time, it keeps happening. The government has failed to provide us security. Even today in this ceremony people are worried lest something will happen," he added.

Numerous shoes belonging to the victims lay unclaimed in a pile at the entrance to the mosque as police stood guard outside.

IS claimed the deadly assault through its propaganda outlet Amaq.

Militants kill three cops in Kashmir

REUTERS, Srinagar

Militants killed three Indian policemen in the Kashmir valley after storming into a police camp yesterday in their biggest strike on a government compound in the disputed region in nearly a year.

One of the militants, who entered the camp in Pulwama town of southern Kashmir, was also killed in the ensuing gunfight, said a senior Indian army officer who declined to be named.

The army and police are jointly trying to dislodge the militants and have evacuated families from the camp's residential block, Lieutenant General J S Sandhu of the Indian army told Reuters.

The attack on the police complex is the biggest on a state security facility since Sept 18 last year, when armed militants broke into an army camp near the de facto border, called the Line of Control (LoC), in Uri, killing 18 army personnel.

The exact number of militants inside the compound is not known, India's federal home ministry said in a statement.

Indian troops have killed 134 militants, including 7 top commanders, this year, officials said. Majority of these militants were eliminated in the last two months after security forces doubled down on an offensive in south Kashmir and along the LoC.

Last year, 150 militants were killed in Kashmir. About 79 militants crossed the LoC into Indian Kashmir in July, according to Indian officials.

RAPE CONVICTION AGAINST INDIAN 'GODMEN'

Letter that brought down the Dera guru

TNN, Chandigarh

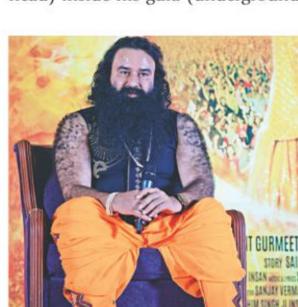
"Lord Krishna had 360 gopies and loved them daily. Yet people worship him as god, so it's not a new thing".

Sirsa-based Dera Sacha Sauda head Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh had reportedly told this to one of his women disciples when she objected to his sexual advances.

The incident was mentioned in the anonymous letter written by a woman disciple of the dera in 2002 to the then prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and then chief justice of the Punjab and Haryana high court. It was this letter that eventually led to a CBI investigation into the sexual exploitation and rape allegations against the preacher.

As per the letter, written by a rape survivor claiming to be from Punjab, she became a 'sadhvi' (female disciple) because of her family, who were the staunch follower of Gurmeet Ram

Rahim Singh. According to her she was feeling proud when after two years of her stay in the dera at Sirsa, she was called by Maharaj ji (dera head) inside his gufa (underground



Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh

living quarters). "It was around 10 pm, when I enter the Gufa, Maharaj was sitting on a bed, holding remote of TV and watching an adult movie. A revolver

was lying on the pillow side of his bed. I was stunned to see this and began to feel dizzy because I never imagined that Maharaj could be like this. He said he has bestowed upon me a special favour by choosing me as his dearest Sadhvi," reads the letter.

According to the letter, when she objected to his gesture, Gurmeet said, "there is no doubt that I am God". When the victim claimed to have asked whether the God indulges in such acts, the Maharaj said, "This is nothing new and has been going on for years together. Lord Krishna had 360 gopies and daily made love to them, yet the people worship him as God".

Thereafter, the author of the letter was raped by the dera head. She was raped repeatedly over the next three year. Further claiming sexual exploitation of other sadhvis by dera head, the letter had mentioned that a large number of women disciples were of the age of 35-40 years of age. They

had crossed the age of marriage and had no other alternative except to live in such circumstances, the letter adds.

Some instances were also mentioned in the letter wherein the girls objecting to these activities inside the dera were beaten up and generally harassed.

Unwilling to disclose her name, as she was apprehensive of being killed if identified, the woman said in the letter that around 30-40 girls were living in the fear and insecurity because of such continuous exploitation.

Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel of the Punjab and Haryana high court had taken suo motu cognizance of the issue raised in the letter on September 3, 2002, and directed the district and sessions judge of Sirsa to visit the dera and submit a report.

After receiving the report, Justice Goel ordered CBI probe into the case on September 24, 2002.