

Floods And Landslides As Hurricane Hits Mexico

Thousands flee inland as the strongest ever storm recorded in the Western Hemisphere strikes the country's western coast.

Hurricane Patricia has hit the western coast of Mexico, tearing down trees, sweeping away cars and forcing thousands of people to flee. Authorities have received reports of some flooding and landslides after the storm made landfall with estimated winds of 165mph (270kph) at Punta Perula between Puerto Vallarta and the major cargo port of Manzanillo. TV news reports showed some toppled trees and lampposts and flooded streets after heavy rain sparked flash flooding. Milenio TV broadcast footage of cars and buses being swept away by floodwaters in the state of Jalisco. There were no initial reports of any casualties or major damage, and around four hours after making landfall Patricia weakened from a Category 5 storm to a Category 4, with winds of 130mph (215kph). Earlier in the day, forecasters warned of a potentially "catastrophic" landfall. But now the hurricane is expected to weaken rapidly and become a tropical storm on Saturday morning, according to the US National Hurricane Center. "The first reports confirm that the damage has been less than those expected from a hurricane of this magnitude," President Enrique Pena Nieto said late on Friday. He added, however, that "we cannot yet let our guard down". The projected path of the hurricane takes it over a mountainous region dotted with isolated hamlets that are at risk of suffering mudslides and flash floods. The government has also warned that ash and other material from the volcano of Colima, around 130 miles (210km) from Puerto Vallarta, could mix with massive rainfall to cause "liquid cement"-style mudflows that could envelop nearby villages. Thousands of locals and tourists were evacuated inland or moved to emergency shelters ahead of the storm, which was at one point the strongest ever recorded in the Western Hemisphere and the third-strongest ever. The hurricane's maximum sustained winds were recorded at 200mph (325kph) at one point, but the storm weakened as it approached land. Tourists in Puerto Vallarta were either evacuated or moved into special hurricane "safe rooms" in their hotels before Patricia made landfall. Loudspeakers along the resort's shore warned people to leave, as did fire engines and ambulances that rolled through town blaring their sirens. Officials later allowed around 200 tourists to return to two hotels. People in Manzanillo boarded up windows and laid sandbags as they prepared for the storm. Flights into and out of the region were cancelled, leaving many with no option but to stay and ride out the hurricane.