

Friday Times

# International

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2017

**UN claims more than 250,000 Rohingya have fled Myanmar**



**California vows to fight for migrant 'Dreamers'**



**No help as Mumbai flood victims are on their own**



An aerial photography taken and released by the Dutch department of Defense on September 6, 2017 shows the damage of Hurricane Irma in Philipsburg, on the Dutch Caribbean island of Sint Maarten. — AFP

## DEADLY IRMA RIPS THROUGH CARIBBEAN

**POINTE PITRE:** Powerful Hurricane Irma cut a swathe of deadly destruction as it roared through the Caribbean, claiming at least nine lives and turning the tropical islands of St Martin and Barbuda into mountains of rubble. One of the most powerful Atlantic storms on record, the rare Category 5 hurricane churned westward off the northern coast of Puerto Rico early yesterday on a potential collision course with south Florida, where at-risk areas were evacuated.

St Martin, a pristine island resort which is divided between France and the Netherlands, suffered the full fury of the storm, with rescuers on the French side saying eight people had died and 21 were injured. Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte said the hurricane had caused "huge damage" to the airport and harbour, leaving the Dutch part of the island unreachable, but there were no immediate reports of deaths.

"The priority now is to bring emergency aid to the people... consisting of sending food and water to 40,000 people over the coming five days," Dutch Interior Minister Ronald Plasterk said. French Interior Minister Gerard

Collomb spoke of "massive destruction" and said more than 100,000 packages of combat rations were en route. And Britain is sending a military vessel to assist victims which should reach the affected areas later yesterday, while earmarking £12 million (\$15.7 million, 13 million euros) in aid. "The British Virgin Islands were also not spared the hurricane's full force," Alan Duncan, a junior foreign minister, told parliament. "We expect that the islands will need extensive humanitarian assistance."

### Tossed aside like matchsticks

As the storm raged westwards, it left scenes of widespread devastation on the islands with the roofs wrenched off many buildings, dozens of huge shipping containers tossed aside like matchsticks and debris flung far and wide, aerial footage from a Dutch naval helicopter showed. Speaking to Dutch broadcaster RTL, Koen, a 20-year-old who lives in the town of Voorhout, said he was shocked by what he saw after the storm passed. "There is huge damage. Sand has been blown over everything. Everything is destroyed." With Irma raging for more than 33

hours, packing winds of up to 295 kilometers per hour, French weather experts said it was longest-lasting superstorm on record.

"Such an intensity, for such a long period, has never been observed in the satellite era," which began in the early 1970s, said Etienne Kapikian of Meteo France, indicating it would probably remain a Category 5 storm until it hits the Bahamas.

With around 80,000 people living on St Martin, French and Dutch officials were racing to activate a rescue plan to help their citizens. On the French side, the storm destroyed 95 percent of homes, officials said, as a 200-member delegation flew in to Guadeloupe to coordinate rescue efforts, headed by France's Overseas Territories Minister Annick Girardin.

Telephone networks were still down on both sides of the island and French officials warned the death toll could rise as rescue teams scour far-flung parts of St Martin as well as the nearby French island of St Barthelemy, also known as St Barts. Home to around 9,500 people, St Barts is known as a playground for the rich and famous, among them Beyonce, Steven Spielberg and Gwyneth Paltrow.

### 'Barbuda now rubble'

As it raged through the region, Irma also laid waste to Barbuda, part of the twin island nation of Antigua and Barbuda, which suffered "absolute devastation" with up to 30 percent of properties demolished, Prime Minister Gaston Browne said. "Barbuda now is literally rubble," he said. One person is known to have died on the small island of 1,600 inhabitants, apparently a child whose family was trying to get to safer ground.

And on the island of Barbados, a 16-year-old professional surfer named Zander Venezia died while trying to ride a monster wave generated by the storm, the World Surf League said. Irma was expected to hit the northern edges of the Dominican Republic and Haiti later yesterday, continuing past eastern Cuba before veering north towards Florida.

More than half of Puerto Rico's population of three million is without power, with rivers breaking their banks in the center and north of the island where Governor Ricardo Rossello activated the National Guard and opened storm shelters sufficient for up to 62,000 people.—AFP