

'Paulette' makes rare landfall in Bermuda, grows to Cat 2

September 14 2020, by Dánica Coto

Hurricane Paulette made a rare landfall in Bermuda Monday and strengthened into a Category 2 storm just hours after the wealthy British territory shuttered schools, government agencies and air and sea ports.

The eye of the storm passed over the island as government officials warned of heavy flooding given that the hit coincided with an unusually high tide. Fewer than 10 hurricanes have made direct landfall on the tiny island in the middle of the Atlantic since the National Hurricane Center began tracking such disasters in the 1850s.

Paulette was centered 115 miles (180 kilometers) north of Bermuda early Monday afternoon and was moving away to the north-northeast at 13 mph (20 kph). It had maximum sustained winds of 105 mph (170 kph), according to the center.

Forecasters said the island would experience hurricane-force winds for roughly seven hours. Power was out across much of the island.

National Security Minister Renee Ming urged people to stay indoors and reminded the more than 70,000 people who live on the island to protect themselves given the COVID-19 pandemic.

"You should be hunkering down to ride out the storm," Ming said during a news conference on Sunday. "We'll see you on the other side, safe."

Bobbi Singh, who has lived in Bermuda for eight years, told The

Associated Press that while she has been through a few hurricanes, every storm brings concerns.

"The biggest challenge was preparing in the midst of COVID-19," she said. "It gave us more the think about when heading out to get supplies in crowded places."

Bermuda is a wealthy financial haven featuring mostly stone and concrete construction required to withstand winds of a strong Category 2 storm.

Faith Bridges, the owner of Aunt Nea's Inn, a hotel along the island's northern tip, told The Associated Press by phone that she had finalized all preparations by Sunday and given her guests flashlights, warning them the power would go out. But she was not worried.

"We obviously have to prepare, but we're built for it," she said.

Ming said she expects the international airport will reopen by Tuesday afternoon as officials warned people to stay off the roads after the hurricane given the possibility of downed power lines.

The center said in its forecast discussion that Paulette would become a major hurricane by Tuesday after it moves away from Bermuda.

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Citation: 'Paulette' makes rare landfall in Bermuda, grows to Cat 2 (2020, September 14)
retrieved 6 May 2024 from
<https://phys.org/news/2020-09-hurricane-paulette-rare-landfall-bermuda.html>

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