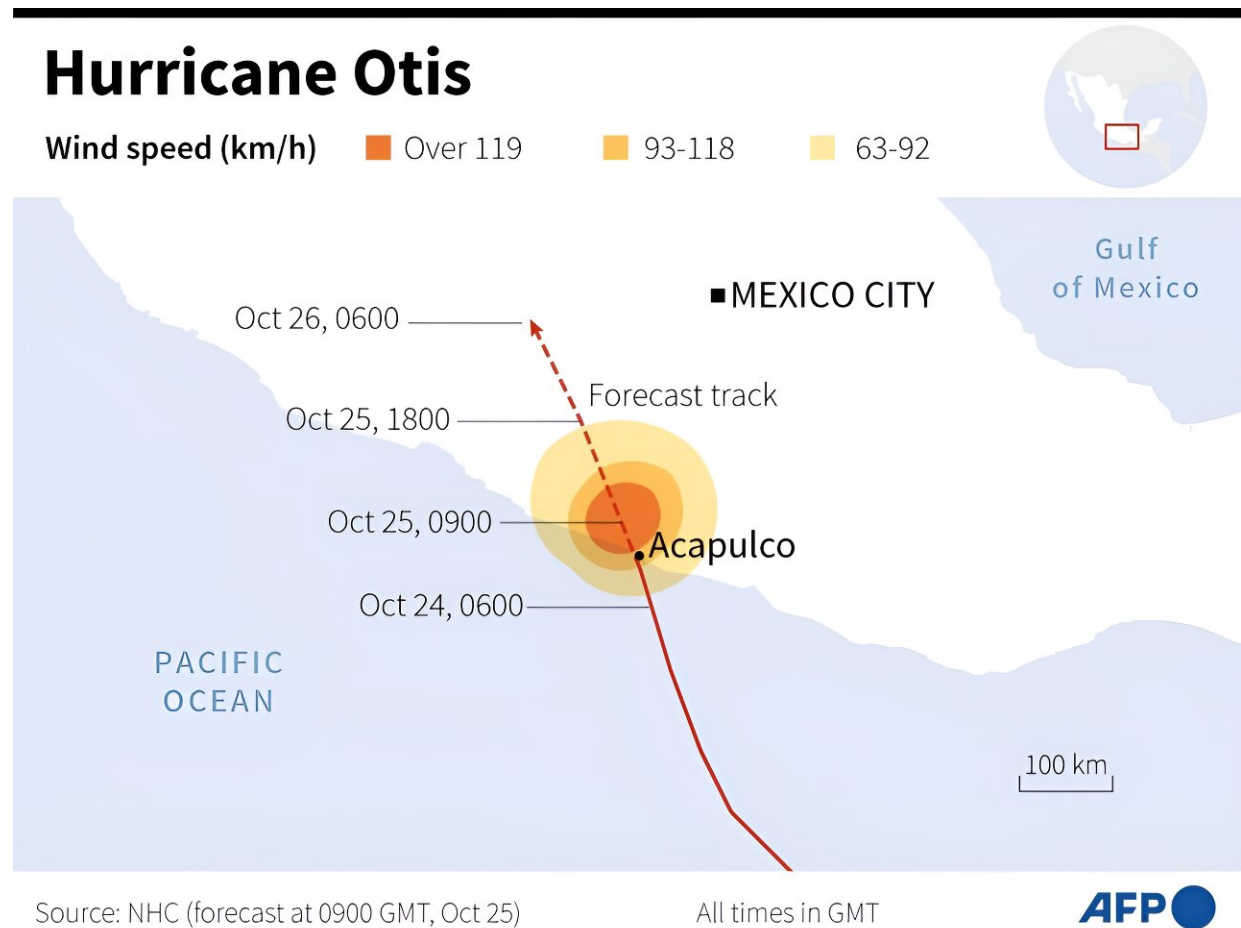


Hurricane Otis cuts off Mexico's battered Acapulco

October 25 2023, by Aurora Harrison



Map showing the forecast track of Hurricane Otis, according to the US National Hurricane Center at 0900 GMT on October 25.

Mexican authorities rushed to send emergency aid and assess damage in the Pacific beach resort of Acapulco on Wednesday after a powerful hurricane severed communications and road links.

President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said that there were no initial reports of deaths after Otis came ashore during the night as a "potentially catastrophic" Category 5 hurricane.

"There's material damage and blocked roads. The highway to Acapulco has landslides," he said at his morning news conference.

Officials emphasized that the lack of communications made it difficult to know the extent of the damage in the seaside city of about 780,000 inhabitants.

A convoy carrying humanitarian aid set off to try to reach Acapulco by land due to the impossibility of flying into the city, authorities said.

"The urgent thing is to attend to the affected population. We still don't have the damage assessment because there's no communication," Civil Protection national coordinator Laura Velazquez said.

Even the navy and military were "seriously affected," she added.

Otis was later downgraded to a tropical storm with maximum sustained winds of around 60 miles (95 kilometers) per hour, down from 165 miles per hour when it hit the coast, the US National Hurricane Center (NHC) said.

The storm had rapidly strengthened to the most powerful category of the five-step Saffir-Simpson scale as it neared land, taking authorities by surprise.



Beach-goers look out to sea as Hurricane Otis approaches the Mexican tourist resort of Acapulco.

"Rarely, according to records, does a hurricane develop so quickly and with such force," Lopez Obrador said.

On Tuesday night, the Mexican president had appealed on social media for people to move to emergency shelters and away from rivers, streams and ravines.

Tourists take shelter

Videos posted on social media showed damaged buildings, shattered windows and tourists using beds and mattresses as protective barriers in their hotel rooms in Acapulco.

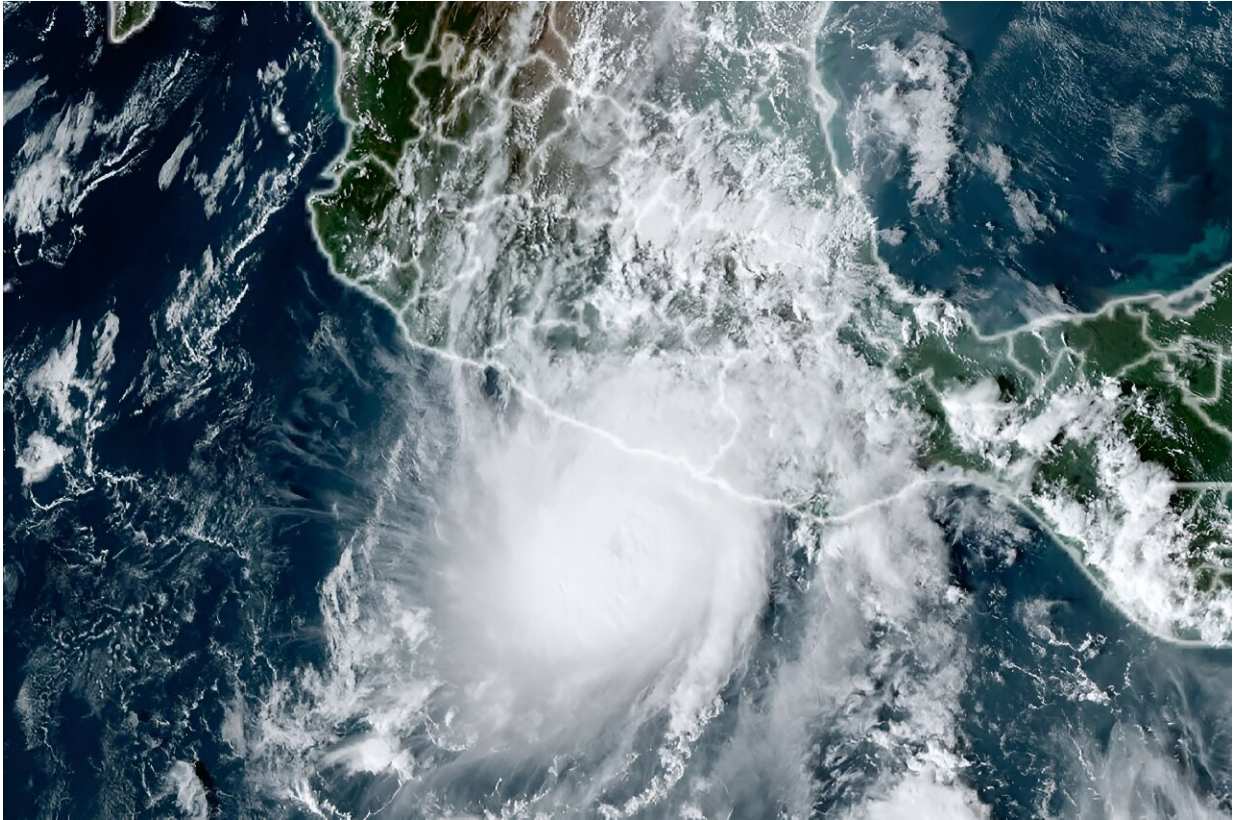
Others took refuge in bathrooms.

Toppled trees were seen in the debris-strewn streets and a shopping mall appeared to have suffered major structural damage.

Before the storm hit, many people bought last-minute supplies of food and water, with some business and homeowners boarding up their windows in Acapulco, located in the southern state of Guerrero.

More than 500 emergency shelters were opened for residents.

There were widespread power blackouts, though state electricity company CFE said Wednesday that it had managed to restore supply to 40 percent of the more than half a million affected customers.



An image from the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration shows Hurricane Otis approaching Mexico's southern Pacific coast.

Heavy rains continued to deluge Guerrero and parts of neighboring Oaxaca—two of Mexico's poorest states, home to remote mountain communities.

"This rainfall will produce flash and urban flooding, along with mudslides in areas of higher terrain," the NHC warned.

Hurricanes hit Mexico every year on both its Pacific and Atlantic coasts, usually between May and November, though few make landfall as a Category 5.

In October 1997, Hurricane Pauline hit Mexico's Pacific coast as a Category 4 storm, leaving more than 200 people dead, some of them in Acapulco.

It was one of the deadliest hurricanes to batter Mexico.

In October 2015, Patricia became the most powerful hurricane ever recorded, pummeling Mexico's Pacific coast with sustained winds of 200 miles per hour.

But the storm caused only material damage and no deaths as it made landfall in a sparsely populated mountainous area.

Just this week, Tropical Storm Norma left three people dead, including a child, after making landfall for a second time in the northwestern state of Sinaloa.

Earlier this month, two people died when Hurricane Lidia, an "extremely dangerous" Category 4 storm, struck the western states of Jalisco and Nayarit.

Scientists have warned that storms are becoming more powerful as the world gets warmer with climate change.

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