

## Tropical storm Alex hits Belize

Tropical Storm Alex made landfall in Belize late Saturday as it caused concern for efforts to clean up the massive Gulf of Mexico oil spill, US forecasters said.

The eye of the storm, which packed sustained winds of 60 miles, passed within just 20 miles northwest of Belize City, and dumped heavy rain on the affected area.

The first major storm of the Atlantic season barreled later on Sunday across the Yucatan Peninsula, after unleashing landslides and floods that killed at least eight people in Nicaragua and El Salvador.

Downgraded to a tropical depression, Alex was expected to restrengthen as it heads back out over the Gulf of Mexico, possibly disrupting operations to contain and clean up the BP oil spill.

Officials in Nicaragua told AFP the bodies of six people had been found in or around the northern city of Esteli, swept to their deaths by torrents from the swollen San Lucas river.

In eastern El Salvador, on Central America's Pacific coast, two people drowned when they were carried away by strong currents near San Miguel, while more than 500 people were evacuated to shelters from high-risk areas.

"Alex is expected to become a tropical storm again on Monday," the National Hurricane Center (NHC), based in Miami, Florida said, adding it would dump 10 to 20 centimeters (four to eight inches) of rain over the Yucatan Peninsula, southern Mexico and Guatemala through Monday afternoon.

Up to 38 centimeters of rain were possible in mountainous areas and forecasters warned of "life-threatening flash floods and mudslides."

At 2100 GMT on Sunday, Tropical Depression Alex was moving in a west-northwesterly direction across Mexico with maximum sustained winds of around 35 miles per hour.