

Storms Alpha and Beta named for Greek alphabet, second time ever



A couple walk up the broken dock to check their boat during Hurricane Sally in downtown Pensacola, Florida

AFP | Washington

Meteorologists were forced to break out the Greek alphabet Friday to name Atlantic storms for only the second time ever after the 2020 hurricane season blew through their usual list, ending on Tropical Storm Wilfred.

Tropical Storm Beta was packing maximum sustained winds of 40 miles (65 kilometers) per hour in the Gulf of Mexico, some 280 miles off the mouth of the Rio Grande, the National Hurricane Center said.

It is expected to reach hurricane intensity over the weekend, according to the Miami-based center.

At the same time, subtropical storm Alpha was forming on the other side of the Atlantic, some 120 miles off the coast of Portugal. With maximum sustained winds of 45 miles per hour, it is not expected to intensify, the NHC said.

The storms were named after letters of the Greek alphabet, after Tropical Storm Wilfred formed earlier Friday, exhausting the list of names predetermined by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) for tropical storms.

The list consists of 21 male and female names that alter-

nate in alphabetical order and change every year. The WMO chooses names that are easily recognizable in a region where several languages are spoken, so no names starting with X, Y or Z are chosen.

In the unusual event that the list is used up, the WMO identifies storms by letters of the Greek alphabet: alpha, beta, gamma, delta... as has been the case this year, which has seen an unusually active hurricane season.

"Get out the Greek alphabet for the rest of 2020," the NHC said in an update on Wilfred.

Meteorologist MJ Ventrice of The Weather Company tweeted that "this is the second time in history we'll be using the Greek Alphabet."

The first time, he added was in 2005, when Hurricanes Katrina and Wilma devastated Louisiana and Florida, respectively.

Those names, as well as Maria, Irma and Harvey, have been retired permanently from the WMO lists due to the devastation they caused.

Meanwhile, Hurricane Teddy has reached Category 4, the second-highest level. Teddy is swirling around the central Atlantic and could pass near Bermuda, just a week after Hurricane Paulette.

Navalny walks down stairs as recovery continues

Alexei Navalny posts photo of himself walking as he recovers from poisoning

● Russian opposition leader describes 'clear path' to recovery and praises Berlin doctors

AFP | Berlin

Russia's leading opposition politician Alexei Navalny announced yesterday he could now walk with a "tremble", and gave the first detailed account of his recovery nearly a month after being poisoned with Novichok nerve agent.

The 44-year-old Kremlin critic posted a photo of himself walking downstairs on Instagram and described how earlier symptoms had included the inability to form words.

"Now I am a guy whose legs tremble when he takes the stairs," he wrote, detailing moments of "despair" as doctors help him overcome the effects of the nerve agent.

This latest update on his progress came after posted to Instagram on Tuesday that he had spent a first day breathing unassisted, writing ironically: "It's an amazing process that's undervalued by many. I recommend it."

The anti-corruption campaigner fell ill on a plane from Siberia to Moscow on August 20 and spent two days in a Russian hospital before being airlifted to Berlin's Charite hospital.

Navalny said in his update that during the initial days of his recovery, he had needed therapy to help him recover his speech



The image Alexei Navalny shared on Instagram

as he struggled to form words.

'A real performance'

"Not long ago, I didn't recognize people and couldn't understand how to speak," he said.

"How to find a word and how to make it mean something? This was all totally incomprehensible.

"I didn't know how to express my despair either and so I was just silent."

The nerve agent Novichok disrupts communication between the brain, the main organs and muscles, while doctors say it gradually clears from the body.

Navalny, who said that he did not remember the early stage of his recovery, thanked the "fantastic doctors" treating him at Charite hospital.

He now saw a "clear path, although not a short one" to recovery, he said.

The message is characteristic of Navalny's fluent, ironic style of writing.

An avid user of social media, Navalny said he hoped soon to "become the highest form of life in modern society" and be "able to scroll through Instagram and add likes without thinking about it".

Suggesting he is struggling with fine motor skills, he said he was still unable to use a phone -- meaning friends or family probably posted the messages for him -- while "pouring myself a glass of water is a real performance".

Kremlin accusations 'absurd'

Navalny has not assigned any blame in his messages so far but supporters and some European leaders have said that poisoning with Novichok, a military-grade nerve agent, points to a state-ordered crime.

“Not long ago, I didn't recognise people and couldn't understand how to speak. How to find a word and how to make it mean something? This was all totally incomprehensible. I didn't know how to express my despair either and so I was just silent

ALEXEI NAVALNY

The Kremlin has dismissed as "absurd" allegations it was behind the poisoning, saying it wants to know what happened.

Evidence of Novichok poisoning sparked calls for new sanctions against Russia and for Germany to abandon a near-completed project to carry Russian gas to Europe, Nord Stream 2.

Russia insists medical tests its doctors carried out found no poison in Navalny's body. It says it lacks grounds for a criminal investigation, despite international calls for a transparent probe.

Low-ranking Siberian transport police have carried out a basic examination of Navalny's movements.

Germany announced earlier this month that medical tests from a military chemical weapons laboratory had found "unequivocal evidence" of the nerve agent.

If you do not snooze you lose: sleep seen as essential for the brain

Reuters | Washington

Scientists are providing a fuller understanding of the essential role that sleep plays in brain health, identifying an abrupt transition at about 2.4 years of age when its primary purpose shifts from brain building to maintenance and repair.

Researchers said they conducted a statistical analysis on data from more than 60 sleep studies. They looked at sleep time, duration of rapid eye movement (REM) sleep, brain size and body size, and devised a mathematical model for how sleep changes during development.

There are basically two types of sleep, each tied to specific brain waves and neuronal activity. REM, with the eyes moving quickly from side to side behind closed eyelids, is deep sleep with vivid dreams. Non-REM sleep is largely dreamless.

During REM sleep, the brain forms new neural connections by building and strengthening synapses - the junctions between nerve cells, or neurons - that enable them to communicate, reinforcing learning and consolidating memories.



A child is seen sleeping with her toy dolls (representative image)

2.4

years after birth, sleep's primary function changes from building and cutting connections during REM sleep to neural repair during both REM and non-REM sleep

During sleep, the brain also repairs the modicum of daily neurological damage it typically experiences to genes and proteins within neurons as well as clearing out byproducts that build up.

At about 2.4 years of age, the findings showed, sleep's primary function changed from

building and cutting connections during REM sleep to neural repair during both REM and non-REM sleep.

"It was shocking to us that this transition was like a switch and so sharp," said Van Savage, a UCLA professor of ecology and evolutionary biology and of computational medicine who is a senior author of the research published in the journal *Science Advances*.

REM sleep declines with age. Newborns, who can sleep about 16 hours daily, spend about 50% of their sleeping time in REM, but there is a pronounced drop-off at around 2.4 years. It drops to about 25% by age 10 and to about 10% to 15% around age 50.

Kamala Harris stars in new comic book birthday gift

AFP | Washington

A day after her birthday, Kamala Harris is getting her own comic book, chronicling her path from childhood to her historic nomination as U.S. vice president.

"Female Force: Kamala Harris," part of Tidalwave Productions' Political Power series, is set for release on Oct. 21, a day after she turns 56. That is less than two weeks before the Nov. 3 US election.

The publisher on its website describes Harris as "full of grit and determination," and says that her "no-nonsense approach and bi-racial heritage have made her a popular member of the Democratic party."

The story begins with her birth in California to Indian biologist Shyamala Gopalan and Jamaican economics professor Donald Harris, and follows her path to becoming the second female African-American and first Asian-American US senator.

A dramatic moment in the Democratic Party's presidential nomination contest is fea-



The cover of "Female Force: Kamala Harris"

tured, when Harris confronts front-runner Joe Biden in a debate about his work with segregationists in the US Senate to oppose school busing - the practice of transporting students to different school districts to improve racial integration.

"There was a little girl in California who was a part of the second class to integrate her public school, and she was bused to school every day," Har-

ris declares. "And that little girl was me."

In a well-known plot twist, Biden clinches the Democratic nomination but names Harris as his running mate.

Other political figures featured in the comic series include US President Donald Trump; Hillary Clinton, his Democratic opponent in the 2016 election; and 2008 US Republican vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin.

