

Caribbean braces for very dangerous Hurricane Beryl

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This National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's GOES satellite handout image shows the Tropical Storm Beryl -- now a hurricane. [NOAA via AFP]

Havana, June 30 (RHC)-- Much of the southeast Caribbean is on alert as Beryl strengthens into the first hurricane of the 2024 Atlantic season, with forecasters warning of a “very dangerous” Category 3 storm.

The U.S. National Hurricane Center (NHC) said Beryl – churning in the Atlantic Ocean about 675km (420 miles) east of Barbados – at 12:30 GMT on Sunday was expected to bring “life-threatening winds and

storm surge” when it reaches the Windward Islands early on Monday.

Barbados, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Grenada were all under hurricane warnings, while tropical storm warnings or watches were in effect for Martinique, Tobago and Dominica, the NHC said in its latest advisory.

Cars were seen lined up at filling stations in the Barbadian capital, Bridgetown, while supermarkets and grocery stores were crowded with shoppers buying food, water and other supplies. Some households were already boarding up their properties.

Beryl is now only the third Category 3 hurricane ever recorded in the Atlantic in June, following Audrey in 1957 and Alma in 1966, according to hurricane expert Michael Lowry.

“Only five major [Category 3+] hurricanes have been recorded in the Atlantic before the first week of July. Beryl would be the sixth and earliest this far east in the tropical Atlantic,” Lowry posted on X.

The NHC said by about 5 a.m. (09:00 GMT) on Sunday, Beryl’s maximum sustained wind speed had increased to nearly 100mph (160kmph) with higher gusts. Such a powerful storm forming this early in the Atlantic hurricane season – which runs from early June to late November – is extremely rare, experts said.

“Hurricane conditions are expected in the hurricane warning area beginning early on Monday,” the NHC said, warning of heavy rain, flooding and storm surge that could raise water levels as much as 9 feet (2.7 metres) above normal.

“Devastating wind damage is expected where the eyewall of Beryl moves through portions of the Windward Islands,” the NHC added, indicating wind speeds in some locations could be 30 percent stronger than those listed in their advisory.

Beryl is likely to pass just south of Barbados early on Monday and then head into the Caribbean Sea as a major hurricane on a path towards Jamaica. It is expected to weaken by midweek but remain a hurricane as it heads towards Mexico.

Forecasters warned of a life-threatening storm surge in areas where Beryl will make landfall, with up to 6 inches (150 mm) of rain for Barbados and nearby islands.

The US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) said in late May that it expects this year to be an “extraordinary” hurricane season, with up to seven storms of Category 3 or higher.

The agency cited warm Atlantic Ocean temperatures and conditions related to the weather phenomenon La Nina in the Pacific for the expected increase in storms.

Extreme weather events including hurricanes have become more frequent and devastating in recent years as a result of climate change.

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