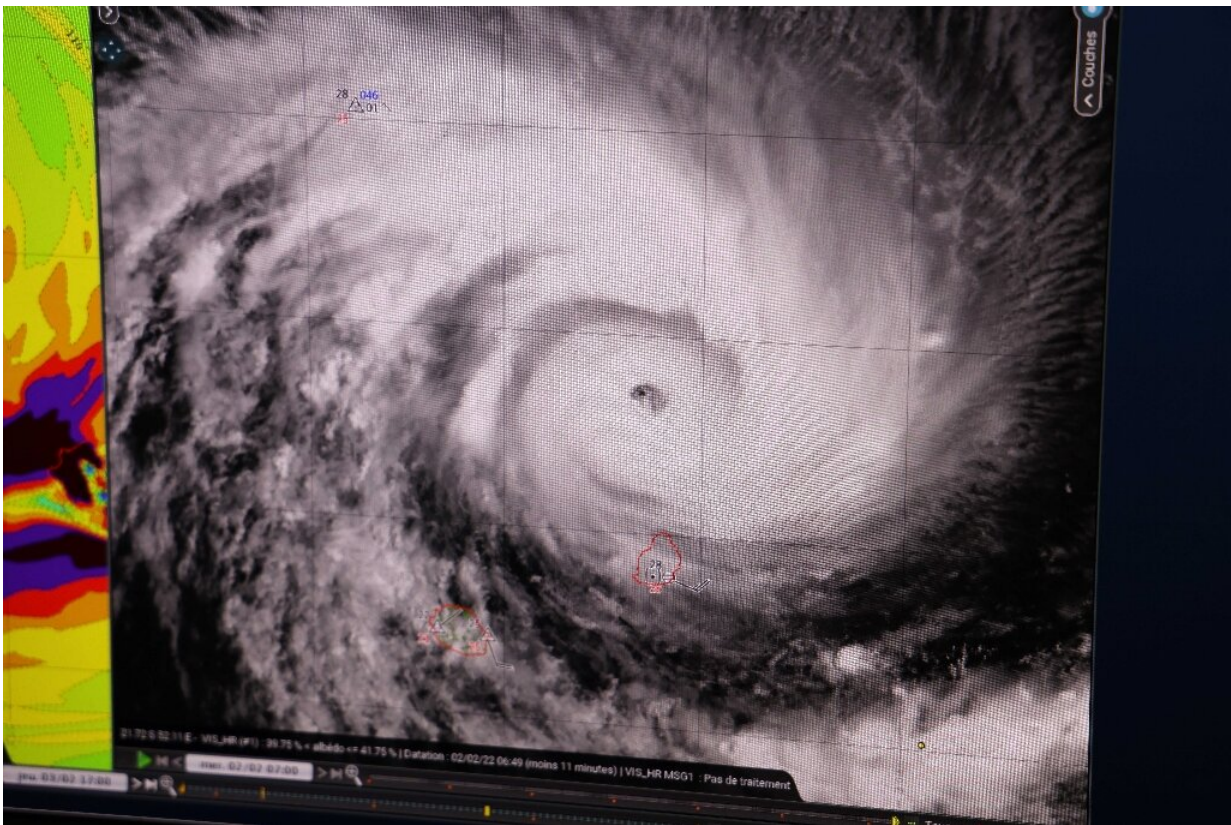


Cyclone Batsirai nears Madagascar, poses 'very serious threat'

February 5 2022



Cyclone Batsirai is set to hit eastern Madagascar after passing Mauritius and La Reunion.

Cyclone Batsirai was expected to reach eastern Madagascar on Saturday, posing a "very serious threat" to millions with powerful winds and

torrential rains set to batter the large Indian Ocean island.

Residents hunkered down before the storm's arrival and winds of more than 200 kilometres per hour (124 miles per hour) were forecast as it bore down on the country still recovering from the deadly Tropical Storm Ana in late January.

After passing Mauritius and drenching the French island of La Reunion for two days with torrential rain, Batsirai was about 250 kilometres east of Madagascar early Saturday, the Meteo-France weather agency said.

Batsirai should make landfall between late afternoon and evening Saturday as an intense tropical cyclone, "presenting a very serious threat to the area", the forecaster said in its morning bulletin Saturday.

The eye of the storm was forecast to cross the centre of the island overnight into Sunday, before leaving its western shores by Monday.

Winds could reach "more than 200 or even 250 km/h... at the point of impact" and waves could reach as high as 15 metres (50 feet), Meteo-France said.

The United Nations said it was ramping up its preparedness with aid agencies, placing rescue aircraft on standby and stockpiling humanitarian supplies.



Tropical Storm Ana killed 58 people and affected at least 131,000 more in Madagascar last month.

The impact of Batsirai on Madagascar is expected to be "considerable", Jens Laerke, spokesman for the UN's humanitarian organisation OCHA, told reporters in Geneva Friday.

At least 131,000 people were affected by Ana across Madagascar in late January. At least 58 people were killed, mostly in the capital Antananarivo. The storm also hit Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, causing dozens of deaths.

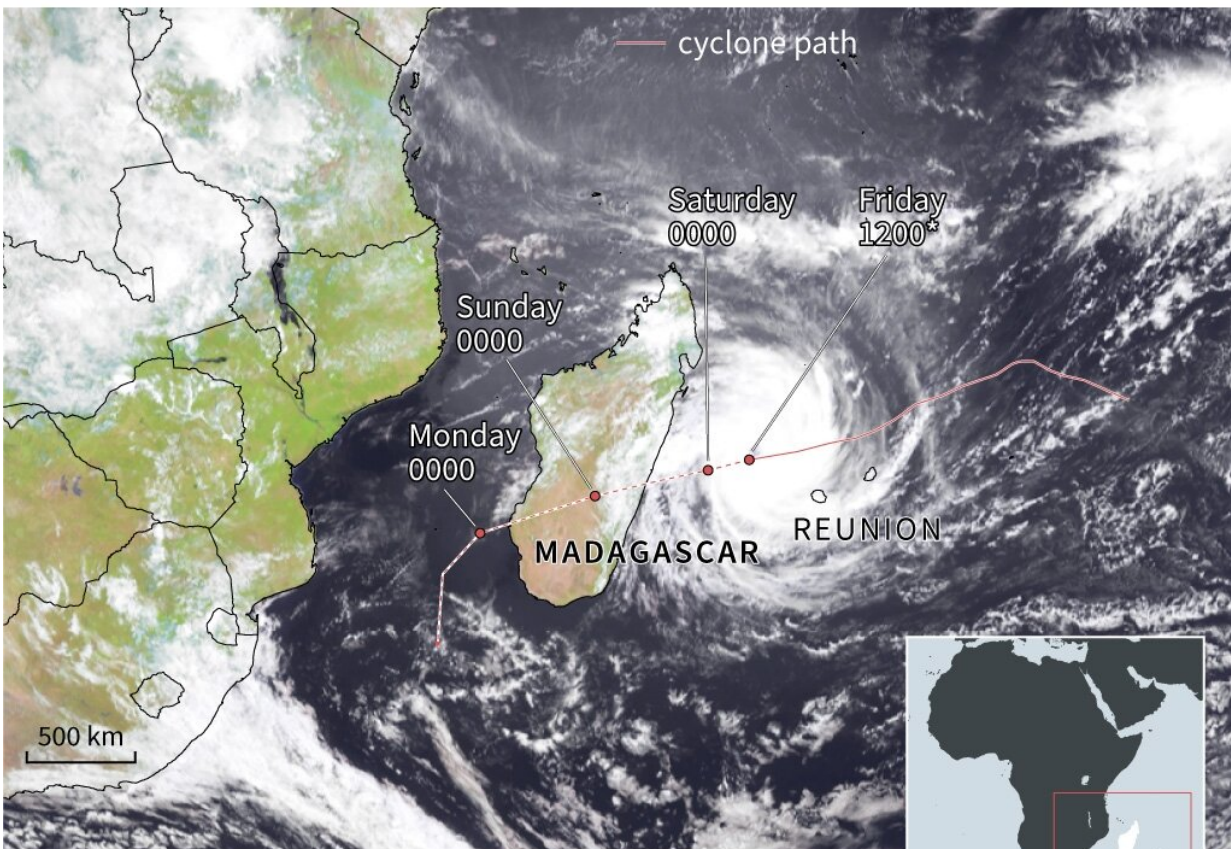
The UN's World Food Programme (WFP) pointed to estimates from national authorities that some 595,000 people could risk being directly

affected by Batsirai, and 150,000 more might be displaced due to new landslides and flooding.

"We are very nervous," Pasqualina Di Sirio, who heads the WFP's programme in Madagascar, told reporters by video-link from the Indian Ocean island.

Search and rescue teams on the island have been placed on alert and residents reinforced their homes.

Cyclone Batsirai



AFP  Source: JTWC Photo satellite: CSU/CIRA et ESA 8H15 GMT *times in GMT

Map showing path of cyclone Batsirai.

Sitting on top of his house, Tsarafidy Ben Ali, a 23-year-old coal seller, held down corrugated iron sheets on the roof with large bags filled with soil.

"The gusts of wind are going to be very strong. That's why we're reinforcing the roofs," he told AFP.

The storm poses a risk to at least 4.4 million people in one way or another, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said.

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