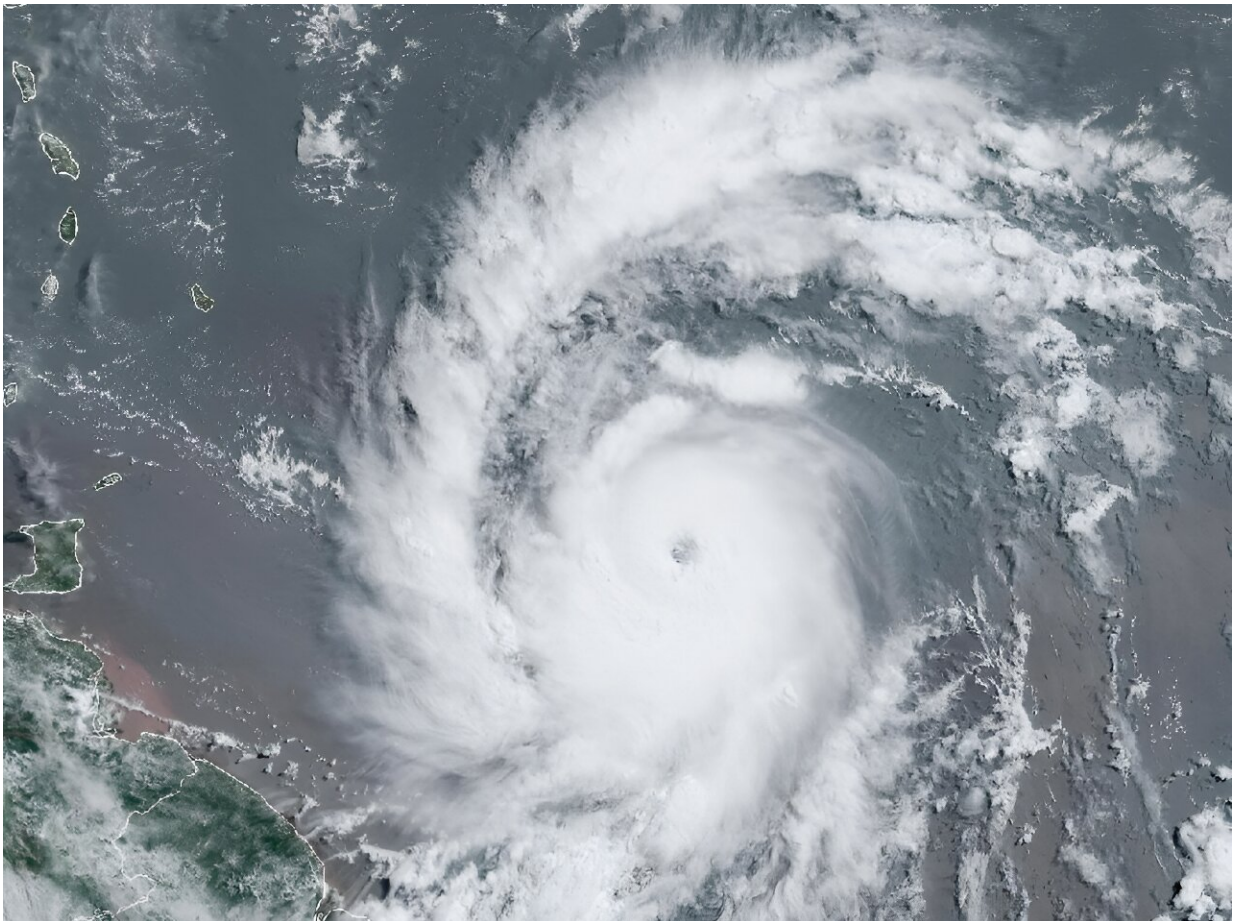


Caribbean braces for powerful Hurricane Beryl

July 1 2024, by Chandan KHANNA



Hurricane Beryl is seen at 1340 GMT on June 30, 2024, in an image courtesy of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)/GOES satellite.

Hurricane Beryl plowed toward the southeast Caribbean early Monday as

officials warned residents to seek shelter ahead of powerful winds and swells expected from the Category 3 storm.

The US National Hurricane Center (NHC) warned in its latest update that Beryl "is expected to remain an extremely dangerous major hurricane as its core moves through the Windward Islands into the eastern Caribbean".

Its maximum sustained wind speed was hovering around 120 miles per hour (195 kilometers per hour) with higher gusts, said NHC.

Beryl was at one point rated Category 4, and experts said such a powerful storm forming this early in the Atlantic hurricane season—which runs from early June to late November—is extremely rare.

"Only five major (Category 3+) hurricanes have been recorded in the Atlantic before the first week of July," hurricane expert Michael Lowry posted on social media platform X.

"Beryl would be the sixth and earliest this far east in the tropical Atlantic."

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines as well as Grenada were at the highest risk of being at the center of the storm's core beginning early Monday, the NHC said, adding that "potentially catastrophic wind damage is expected".

Those two locales, plus Barbados, Saint Lucia, and Tobago were all under hurricane warnings, the NHC said, while tropical storm warnings or watches were in effect for Martinique, Trinidad, and southern Haiti and the Dominican Republic.



Cars line up at a gas station as Hurricane Beryl heads towards Bridgetown, Barbados, on June 29, 2024.

A state of emergency was declared in Tobago, the smaller of the two islands that make up Trinidad and Tobago, with schools ordered closed on Monday, top official Farley Augustine said.

Grenada's disaster management agency said "rapidly" moving Beryl was expected to make landfall between 8:00 am and 8:00 pm on Monday.

Grenada Prime Minister Dickon Mitchell urged citizens to quickly seek shelter and to respect an island-wide curfew ordered for 7:00 pm to 7:00 am Tuesday morning.

A meeting this week in Grenada of the Caribbean regional bloc CARICOM was postponed due to the hurricane.

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

Devastating wind damage

Beryl became the first hurricane of the 2024 Atlantic season early Saturday morning and quickly strengthened to Category 4, the first ever to reach that level in June, according to NHC records.



A man boards up a shop window as people prepare for the arrival of Hurricane Beryl in Bridgetown, Barbados.

A Category 3 or higher on the Saffir-Simpson scale is considered a major hurricane, and a Category 4 storm packs sustained winds of at least 130 miles per hour (209 kilometers per hour).

Beryl is expected to remain powerful as it moves across the Caribbean, the NHC said, warning residents and officials in the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, the Cayman Islands and the rest of the northwestern Caribbean to carefully monitor its progress.

The US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration 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 Niña in the Pacific for the expected increase in storms.

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

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