

‘Very, Very Serious’: Melissa Strengthens to a Category 5 Hurricane as It Nears Jamaica

Hurricane Melissa intensified to Category 5 strength on Monday as it neared Jamaica with up to 30 inches (76 centimeters) of rain and a life-threatening storm surge.

Melissa is forecast to make landfall on the island on Tuesday and cross Cuba and the Bahamas through Wednesday.

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Melissa was centered about 130 miles (205 kilometers) south-southwest of Kingston, Jamaica, and about 315 miles (505 kilometers) south-southwest of Guantánamo, Cuba, the U.S. National Hurricane Center in Miami said.

The hurricane had maximum sustained winds of 160 mph (260 kph) and was moving west at 3 mph (6 kph), the center said.

Category 5 is the highest on the Saffir-Simpson scale with sustained winds exceeding 157 mph (250 kph). Melissa is the strongest hurricane in recent history to hit the small Caribbean nation directly.



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Some local areas of eastern Jamaica could get 40 inches (1 meter) of rain while western Haiti could get 16 inches (40 centimeters), according to the hurricane center. “Catastrophic flash flooding and numerous landslides are likely,” it warned.

The slow-moving storm has killed at least three people in Haiti and a fourth person in the Dominican Republic, where

another person remains missing.

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“I want to urge Jamaicans to take this seriously,” said Desmond McKenzie, deputy chairman of Jamaica’s Disaster Risk Management Council. “Do not gamble with Melissa. It’s not a safe bet.”

The hurricane was expected to make another landfall later Tuesday in eastern Cuba. A hurricane warning was in effect for Granma, Santiago de Cuba, Guantánamo and Holguin provinces, while a tropical storm warning was in effect for Las Tunas. Up to 20 inches (51 centimeters) of rain were forecast for parts of Cuba, along with a significant storm surge along the coast.

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Melissa could be the strongest hurricane Jamaica has experienced in decades, said Evan Thompson, principal director at Jamaica’s meteorological service. He warned that cleanup and damage assessment would be severely delayed because of anticipated landslides, flooding and blocked roads.

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