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Thursday, 19 January 2023

Severe Tropical Storm “Cheneso” approaching north-eastern Madagascar

The first “named” tropical system for the 2023 calendar year, for the South-West Indian Ocean domain, has formed and intensified overnight. The system is currently rated as a Severe Tropical Storm, with an estimated surface pressure of 991 hPa in the core of the system. At 08h00 South African time, “Cheneso” was positioned at 14.6 South 050.5 East, moving south-westwards at 17 km/h, just off the north-eastern coastline of Madagascar (in the province of Sava) and is expected to make landfall imminently, between the coastal towns of Antalaha and Sambava.

The latest numeric weather prediction (NWP) models, as well as guidance from the Regional Specialist Meteorological Centre (RSMC) at La Reunion Island, suggest that once “Cheneso” makes landfall today, it will slow overland (due to increased friction with the land surface) and swing towards a more southerly track over the northern interior of Madagascar during the next 1-2 days.

It must, however be strongly emphasised that, given current guidance from numeric weather prediction models (NWP), this system is not expected to affect South Africa in the coming days. It is also important to mention that, as with any tropical marine system, there is much uncertainty regarding the future movement of the system, beyond a few days ahead in time. Notwithstanding this uncertainty, there is the possibility that “Cheneso” may enter the Mozambique Channel at some stage.

As such, “Cheneso” is the third “named” tropical system to form in the South-West Indian Ocean domain during the current 2022 to 2023 austral summer season. It will be recalled that such systems are named alphabetically, according to a dedicated regional list developed annually. The

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first two systems were Moderate Tropical Storms “Ashley” and “Balita”, which occurred during September and October 2022 respectively.

Interestingly, an uncommon event occurred during the current 2022 to 2023 tropical cyclone season. There was an additional “named” system, namely Severe Tropical Storm “Darian”, which crossed into the South-West Indian Ocean domain at 90 East, on 21 December 2022. “Darian” had previously been identified and named by the Australian Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) whilst it was in South-East Indian Ocean waters, east of 90 East. Following convention, the name “Darian” was preserved when the system crossed over into the South-West Indian Ocean domain.

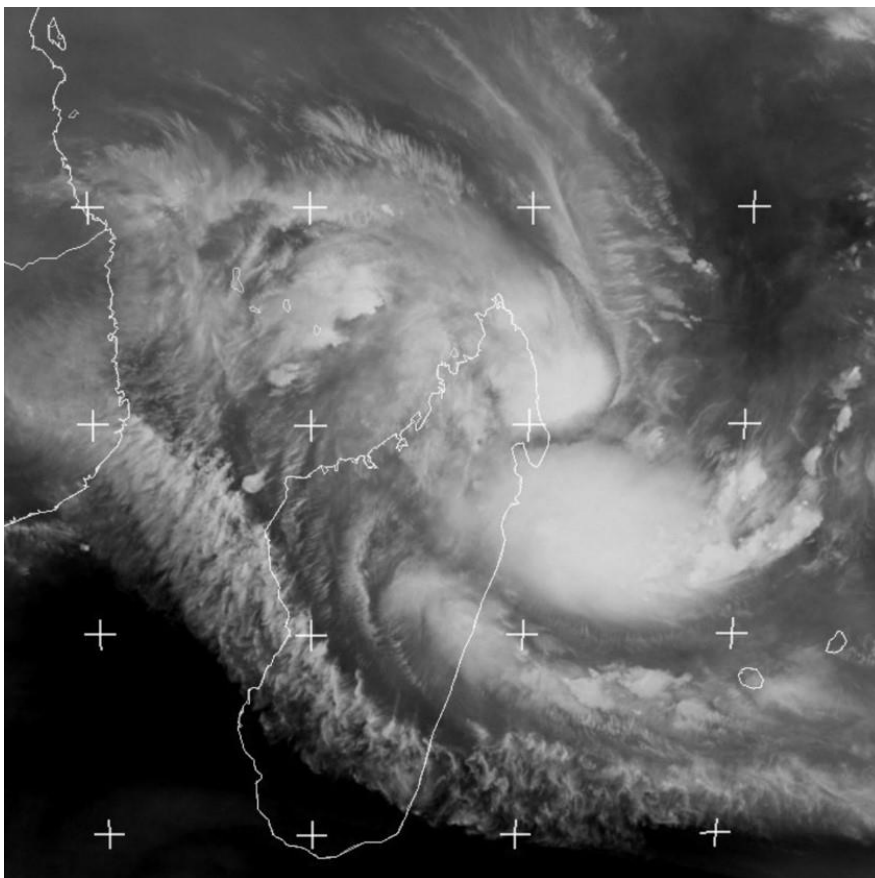


Figure 1: Satellite image of “Cheneso” at 07h00SAST this morning, Thursday 19 January 2023 in the “water vapour channel”. Image courtesy of Eumetsat © 2023.

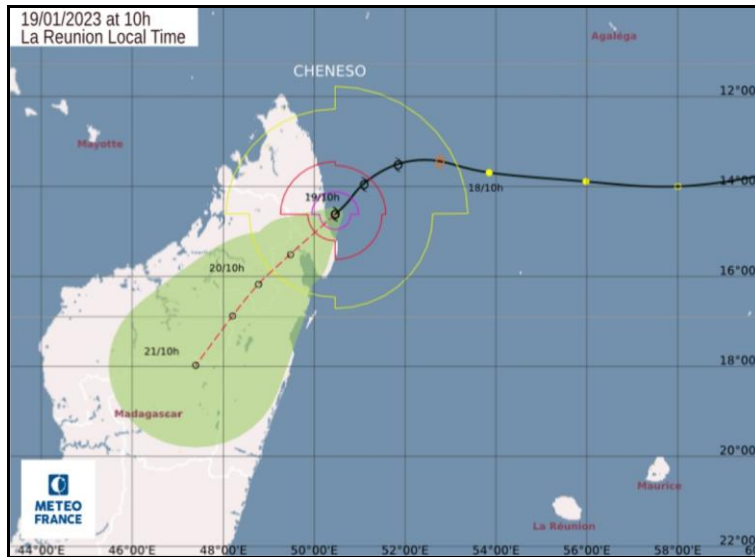


Figure 2: The latest projected track for “Cheneso”, issued by RSMC La Reunion at 08h00SAST this morning, Thursday 19 January 2023.

Returning to the current system, namely Severe Tropical Storm “Cheneso”, it is likely that the system will continue to lash the northern and north-eastern coastlines of Madagascar with gale-force to strong gale-force winds as well as widespread torrential rain and associated flash-flooding. Moreover, there is also the risk of widespread wind damage to the built environment as well as injury to persons and livestock due to flying debris. Storm surge and extremely rough sea conditions are further marine-related risks facing coastal communities along the northern and north-eastern Madagascan coastline.

The South African Weather Service (SAWS) will continue to monitor this system and will issue further updates as and when required. In closing, “Cheneso” poses no direct risk or threat to South Africa at the current time.

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