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## Small islands to get worst of Southwest Pacific cyclone season

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WELLINGTON, (XINHUA) --- The southwest Pacific Ocean expects an average number of tropical cyclones to strike this season, but some small island nations will fare worst, according to a New Zealand government forecast on Wednesday.

The average number of named tropical cyclones was 12.4 for the season, which runs from November to April and the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research Southwest Pacific Tropical Cyclone Outlook indicated eight to 12 were expected in the coming season.

Tropical cyclone activity for Vanuatu and New Caledonia, which normally saw the most cyclones, was anticipated to be below normal for this season, while elevated activity was expected for Samoa, Tuvalu, Tokelau, Niue and the Southern Cook Islands, it said.

Normal or above normal activity was forecast for countries situated close to the International Date Line, such as Wallis et Futuna and Tonga, it said.

"It should be recognized that the season-long forecast reflects an expectation of overall reduced activity during the early season (November to January) and net increased activity in general during the late season (February to April)," it said.

The outlook indicated two or more cyclones could affect islands like New Caledonia, Vanuatu, Fiji and Tonga, and at least one or more severe tropical cyclone could occur anywhere across the Southwest Pacific during the season.

"All communities should remain vigilant and follow forecast information provided by their national meteorological service," it said.

Disaster relief groups are preparing for more severe cyclones this year as a weak El Nino weather disruption is expected in the Pacific.

Relief organizations are particularly concerned about Tonga, where some islands are currently suffering a drought while still recovering from Tropical Cyclone Ian, which left one dead and hundreds homeless in January.