

Current El Nino may develop into La Nina later this year: Prof

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KOTA KINABALU: There is a possibility that the current El Nino phase may develop into La Nina in the latter half of this year.



If the forecast is accurate, Sabah will have experienced two climate patterns associated with more than normal dry and wet conditions by year end at least.

But according to Dr Fredolin Tangang, a professor in climatology and oceanography from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, it is still premature to tell if this will happen although current forecast shows the probability is between 30 to 40 per cent.

"There's always a possibility. In fact, from the latest NOAA forecast you can see that they indicate there's a possibility between 30 to 40 per cent," he told the Daily Express. NOAA stands for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in the US that monitors daily weather forecasts, severe storm warnings and climate monitoring.

Tangang, a Sabahan, said it would only be sometime in March or April before the forecast can tell whether the current El Nino phase would develop into La Nina.

"As of now we know that once the El Nino period is over we will go into neutral condition. But we'll have a clearer picture as we move to March or April when they update the forecast," he explained.

La Nina events are associated with rainier than normal conditions that have caused floods and landslips, sometimes with devastating effect.

It is said that La Nina events sometimes follow El Nino events which occur at irregular intervals of about

two to seven years. But unlike El Nino, meaning "little boy" in Spanish, that usually lasts no more than a year, La Nina, meaning "little girl" in the same language, may last much longer.

Tangang confirmed, however, that the current El Nino phenomenon is at a decaying phase and will be over by the end of May. The climate pattern has caused months of more than normal dry spell to the State and north of Sarawak.

He said during the months between January and April, the State usually goes through a dry period with not much rainfall but the situation is worsened when El Nino hits. When the phenomena struck between 1997/98, Tangang recalled rainfall in Kota Kinabalu was recorded at only 4.7 per cent, which was extremely low.

But he explained that this phenomena also brings more than normal rainfall depending on the time and place as evidenced by the floods Kuching in Sarawak few days ago.

Tangang, who researched and developed a model to forecast the El Nino - Southern Oscillation (ESNO), cautioned that although the El Nino phase is now at the decaying stage, it does not mean people can be complacent and urged everyone to always take precautionary measures in order to minimise its impact.

"In the next couple of months, it's critical for the authorities to monitor so we can minimise its impact," he said, suggesting the monitoring of water resources in rural communities who rely on rainfall for drinking water and open burning activities as among top priority.

He added that in fact the authorities and all relevant parties have a body of information available in order to be better prepared months before the phenomenon strikes and ensure its impact will not be severe.

He reminded that both the El Nino and La Nina phenomenon are normal climate patterns that cannot be stopped or mitigated.