Return of El Nino and possible decline in paddy production during Yala 2003

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Although not as strong as in 1997/98, a weather anomaly returned in 2002/2003. The most devastating El Nino occurred during 1997/98. In Indonesia alone, the effects of large-scale forest fires during 1997/98 El Nino were unprecedented, damaging more than 9.7 million hectares of forest area. The smoke and haze from these fires affected not only Indonesia but also other South-East Asian countries, in particular Brunei, Darussalam, Malaysia and Singapore.

El Nino is a disruption of the ocean-atmosphere system in the tropical Pacific having important consequences for weather around the globe. Unusual weather conditions such as jet streams, storm tracks and shifting of monsoons occur around the globe. Such disarray is caused by a warm current of water in the Eastern Pacific since the usual precipitation patterns can be greatly disrupted by either excessively wet or dry conditions.

Shifts in tropical rainfall and winds can also affect outside of the tropics by altering prevailing wind patterns that circulate around the globe and this phenomenon is called tele-connections. There are number of international agencies involved in forecasting and monitoring the developments of El Nino events. World Meteorological Organization (WMO), Bureau of Meteorology-Australia, National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and International Research Institute for Climate Prediction (IRI) are some of them.

Forecasts and developments of El Nino events are published and updated regularly in their web sites. These agencies predicted the return of El Nino during 2002/2003 well in advance. Such forecasts help countries to anticipate and mitigate impacts of droughts and floods.

Agricultural effects

The agriculture is one of the sectors that can be affected by droughts, floods etc. caused by the El Nino events. Scientists have discovered that for some countries such as India, there is a linkage between agricultural production and El Nino events. There are two paddy cultivation seasons namely Maha and Yala.

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