Weather-roiling El Nino odds have fallen, says US agency

BLOOMBERG

The odds of a weather-roiling Pacific Ocean El Nino returning to disrupt crops across the globe by year's end have dropped slightly.

There is now a 51 per cent chance that El Nino will emerge sometime from October through December, down from 53 per cent last month, the US Climate Prediction Center said. The phenomenon comes about when the equatorial Pacific's surface warms, causing changes to the atmosphere.

To me those probabilities are virtually the same, said Michelle LHeureux, a forecaster with the US Climate Prediction Center in College Park, Maryland.

Ten to 15 per cent swings are meaningful but the smaller percentages here and there are not.

An El Nino that started in 2015 withered rice crops across Southeast Asia, cocoa fields in Ghana and sugar cane in Thailand.

Drought conditions pummeled coffee growers in Vietnam and accelerated forest fires across southeast Asia, wreathing major cities in smoke before giving way to an ocean-cooling La Nina.

The phenomenon may create wind shear across the central Atlantic, a variation in wind velocity that makes tropical storms and hurricanes less likely to form. Storms and hurricanes in the Atlantic may fall below the 30-year average this year, Colorado State University said in its annual forecast.

Warmer-than-normal Pacific waters near Peru have caused severe flooding there. On the other side of the basin, the ocean is cooler and looks to be closer to La Nina, LHeureux said. While some forecast models call for the warmth near Peru to spread across the Pacific and spark an El Nino, U.S. meteorologists arent ready to endorse those results, she said.

Basically 50 per cent means were sitting on the fence, LHeureux said. It just means it is something to watch. On Tuesday, the Australian Bureau of Meteorology extended its El Nino watch for the Pacific, saying there was also about a 50 per cent chance one will develop. The US and Australia use slightly different criteria for defining the event.

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