

# Alarm raised as La Nina brings wet dampener

**PETALING JAYA:** Experts have sounded the alarm over the state of Cameron Highlands with fears that La Nina will hit by the end of the year.

While Cameron Highlands has seen this year as one of its driest yet – affecting even its vegetable and flower production – the rains may yet bring havoc with landslides and flooding.

The area has seen a total rainfall of 221mm from January to April compared with 763.2mm for the same period in 2006.

Climate expert Prof Datuk Dr Azizan Abu Samah said there was now over a 70% chance of La Nina hitting between October and December during the north-east monsoon.

“We could see 10% to 15% more rainfall across the region,” he said.

The large clearing – legal and illegal – of forests in Cameron Highlands for vegetable farming, he said, was likely to lead to landslides, particularly at slopes with 25-degree inclination or more.

“Forests are better ‘exporters’ of rain than vegetables. Rain water doesn’t infiltrate the soil as deep in vegetable plots as in the forest

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Prof Datuk Dr Azizan Abu Samah

because their roots aren’t very deep.

“The soil around the vegetables quickly gets saturated and it cannot hold the water. So, there’s a high run-off,” he said.

“Chances of landslides occurring around vegetable plots are higher than in forests. If there are slopes, that’s much worse,” he said.

Depending on the slopes, Prof Azizan warned that a big chunk of soil could be sliced off the slope.

“It is a major disaster that can kill. You are talking of tonnes and tonnes of soil moving,” he said.

In its May 12 update, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in United States said that while the world weather was still in a weakening El Nino phase, there was a 75% chance of La Nina striking in fall and winter.

While Cameron Highlands is undergoing a dry spell now with less rain as it moves into the southwest monsoon, Prof Azizan said this was still broken by thunderstorms.

“Thunderstorms have a high intensity of rainfall around 60 to 100mm per hour. So, it has very strong erosion power. I expect more flooding,” he said.

There are an estimated 4,000 legal and illegal farms in Cameron Highlands.

Cameron Highlands has already had several bad experience with flooding, with erosion causing sedimentation on river beds, making the rivers shallower and more likely to burst their banks.

Already, there was a landslide in Kuala Terla just days ago.

“Be prepared for the worst,” said Regional Environmental Awareness Cameron Highlands president R. Ramakrishnan.