

## #CLIMATE-CHANGE

La Niña refers to the ENSO phase in which sea-surface temperatures are cooler than normal. Continuance of La Niña into 2023 is not bad news from the Indian standpoint, but it is not the same for other regions.

## The 'triple dip' La Niña



The ongoing La Niña phase of the equatorial Pacific Ocean has just been predicted to persist for at least another six months, making it one of the longest ever La Niña episodes in recorded history. It is also only the third episode since 1950 to stretch into a third year. This is likely to have wide-ranging implications for weather events across the world in the coming months, and can potentially aggravate both floods and droughts in different regions.

The periodic warming and cooling of surface waters in the equatorial Pacific Ocean - a phenomenon described as El Niño Southern Oscillations, or ENSO - is known to trigger widespread changes in atmospheric conditions, and has a major influence on global weather patterns, including the Indian monsoon. La Niña refers to the ENSO phase in which sea-surface temperatures are cooler than normal. The warmer phase is known



as El Niño. A result of interactions between ocean and wind systems, El Niño and La Niña have almost opposite impacts on weather events.

### 'Triple dip' La Niña

El Niño and La Niña episodes typically last for about nine months to a year. They usually develop in the March-June period, and are the strongest during winter (November-January in the northern hemisphere), before weakening or dissipating by March or April of next year.

Occasionally, however, they continue for much longer periods. In recent years, the El Niño of 2015-16, spread over 19 months, was one of the longest on record, and was dubbed 'Godzilla' due to its sustained high intensity.

The current La Niña episode has already surpassed that in length. Having started in September 2020, it has prevailed for the last 24 months, and looks set to continue for another six months, and has thus been classified as a 'triple



The routine was unvaried. For her there were no holidays, no overtime, no strikes, no breaks, no go-slows and she could not coerce or pressurise anybody to increase her privileges and emoluments. No politician came to support her in vociferous declamation and she got no dearness allowance to cushion the impact of rising prices.



However, El Niño and La Niña events are not mirror images of each other. They differ in length and strength. El Niño episodes occur more frequently and are usually associated with more impactful weather events. La Niña, on the other hand, has a longer run. That is why multi-year La Niña events, those that continue for more than 12 months, are quite common. An El Niño is more likely to be a single-year event.

According to a recent paper published by Chinese researchers, almost half (six out of 13) of all La Niña events since 1950 have stretched for two years, while three, including the current one, have continued for three years. In contrast, over 75% of El Niño events (15 out of 20) ended within a year. No El Niño has ever stretched into a third year.

While prolonged La Niña episodes are not uncommon, the current one differs from the previous two triple-year events in an important aspect. Both the earlier events - one between 1973 and 1976, and the other between 1998 and 2001 - were preceded by a strong El Niño. Prolonged La Niña events in those instances could be explained by the fact that the amount of accumulated heat in the oceans was higher, and therefore took a longer time to dissipate. In the absence of a strong El Niño preceding it, the reason for the current La Niña episode is not very clear at the moment.

### Evaluating the likely impact

In the Indian context, La Niña is associated with good rainfall during the monsoon season. This is the opposite of El Niño which is known to suppress monsoon rainfall. Thus, a continued spell of La Niña could lead to expectation of another year of good, or normal, rainfall during the monsoon. Until now, the monsoon season this year has produced 7% more rain compared to normal. Last year, the seasonal rainfall was almost 100%.

But, even though powerful, ENSO condition is only one of the several factors affecting monsoon rainfall in India. There is no one-on-one correlation between the ENSO condition and the amount of rainfall. Also, the influence of ENSO is at a macro level. There are wide variations in rainfall at the local level, which are getting exacerbated by climate change.

The continuance of La Niña further into 2023 is not bad news from the Indian standpoint. But it is not the same for many other regions where La Niña has very different impacts.

# An Insignificant Woman



They are the sole hope of dependants anxiously awaiting them at home at the day's end.

### The Struggle for Existence

Sixty-year-old Gowri was one among them. Her son, a factory worker, had been killed in an accident three years ago and her daughter-in-law had succumbed to TB a year later. So, in the evening of her life, Gowri had taken up the struggle for existence, not so much for herself as for her three young grandchildren, the eldest of whom was only six years old.

Every day, early in the morning, she would leave their improvised home in a neglected, ancient tomb (thank the Lord for the megalomania of the sultans of yore!) and proceed to the wholesale market. There she would purchase a few rupees' worth of raw peanuts and then vend her way towards her 'place of business' - a niche on the pavement of a street leading to the main road of the city. Here, wedged between a fortune teller and a cut-pie seller, she would squat the whole day, peanuts roasting over the dull heat of a crude coal brazier, awaiting the occasional customer who would be doled out the peanuts from a small

## #STORY

dozen of them, all bigger and more ebullient than on the previous days. And the police had turned out in greater strength. Suddenly, around noon, Gowri noticed shopkeepers on the street hastily shutting shutters. She saw a mob of youngsters marching down the street, yelling vociferously, throwing stones at parked cars and storefronts which were still open and attempting to set fire to a milk booth. She noticed some of the ruffians rushing into a fair price shop and running out with bags of rice and sugar.

A city bus that just turned into the street from the main road was attacked by vandals with a hail of stones. The windshield shattered and the bus came to a screeching halt. The attackers surrounded the bus, asked the occupants to get out and then, with the kerosene louted from a nearby dealer's shop, set fire to the vehicle. And all the while they laughed, hooted and jeered as if it was all a game. Hundreds of onlookers gazed passively at the orgy of destruction, too frightened to intervene.

Gowri had, in the meantime, gathered up her belongings and was about to hurry off towards the main road when two police vans came rushing in from the side and a

trade. The champions of the masses might thump their chests at the success of a bandh but her grandchildren had to go hungry to a whimpering sleep on those disturbed days.

### Not an Ordinary Day

In the last few days she had noticed an increased restiveness in the pulse of the city. She was informed by fellow peddlers that the Opposition parties had launched an anti-price rise campaign and that the college students had joined the agitation. Every day, some procession or other would pass the street in front of her, consisting of angry, slogan-shouting men and women and followed at some distance by a police van filled with helmeted police. She desperately hoped the current disturbances would not lead to a bandh or curfew.

Today she had left her home with the promise to the children to bring some sweets in the evening. When she reached her usual niche on the pavement, she detected an undercurrent of unease in the air. But she could not close shop on that account. In fact, today she had to try to improve her earnings to compensate for the cost of the sweets she had bought. So, disregarding the nervousness of the hawkers, she spread out her wares and sat down as if it was an ordinary day. But it was not to be an ordinary day. Around 10 a.m., the processions started. Today they were half-a-



And then the ultimate happened. The desperate policemen opened fire. Three rounds were fired before the rioters took to their heels. As the third round was fired, Gowri felt a sudden searing stab of agony and then knew no more. A sudden hush descended on the scene, broken by the groans of the injured and the crackling of flames.

A few dozen policemen emerged firing tear gas shells at the rioters. Immediately they were subjected to a barrage of brickbats.

Gowri, caught in between, dared not move out and cowered in the corner of a building. The fury of the battle increased. The air became thick with tear gas and her eyes smarted. She saw some policemen being carried away with bad gashes on their faces and heads.

### A Searing Stab of Agony

A cane charge was ordered and the rioters retreated temporarily. A few of them who were not quick enough, were caught by the cane wielding policemen and mercilessly beaten up. But again the rioters gathered in number and let fly a hail of stones and soda bottles at the police, who had to fall back. A few of the local toughs set fire to a cloth shop.

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That night, the students who had run away, slept soundly in their beds with a sense of accomplishment. The goondas who had looted the grain shop were celebrating with satisfaction. The Opposition politicians reviewed the day's happenings and discussed further strategy. The Cabinet, meeting in emergency session, deliberated about declaring a curfew and calling in the Army.



And, in an old, decaying tomb, three hungry, tearful children awaited in vain the return of their granny.

### The next day's paper ran the following news item:

Police Fire on Violent Mob, One dead, Ten Injured. An old woman peanut seller was killed and ten others injured, four seriously, when the police opened fire on a violent mob of stone-throwing students in Patel Street at noon yesterday. The police claim that thirty of their men were injured in the brick-battling. The Opposition parties have demanded a judicial probe into the firing and the president of the university students' union has demanded suspension of the magistrate who ordered it. The State Government has ordered all educational institutions in the city closed for one week in view of the student disturbances.

None of the newspapers carried anything about Gowri and her background, although all of them ran statements by various politicians and student leaders. None of the papers speculated about Gowri's kith and kin.

After all, she was just an insignificant old woman selling peanuts on the pavement.

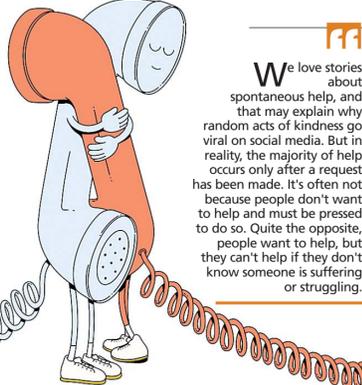
writeoarbit@ashtradrout.com

(Images are for representation purpose only)

## #PSYCHOLOGY

# Happy To Help!

People regularly underestimate others' willingness to help. But, people want to make a difference in people's lives and they feel good.



We shy away from asking for help because we don't want to bother other people, assuming that our request will feel like an inconvenience to them. But oftentimes, the opposite is true: People want to make a difference in people's lives and they feel good-happy even when where people either directly interacted with each other to seek and offer help, or imagined or recalled such experiences in everyday life.

We consistently observed that help-seekers underestimated how willing strangers and even friends would be to help them and how positive helpers would feel afterward, and overestimated how inconvenienced helpers would feel.



Here, Zhao discusses the research that how asking for assistance can lead to meaningful experiences and strengthen relationships with others, friends as well as strangers.

**Q: Why is asking for help hard? For someone who finds it difficult to ask for help, what would you like them to know?**

**A:** There are several common reasons why people struggle to ask for help. Some people may fear that asking for help would make them appear incompetent, weak, or inferior-recent research from Stanford doctoral student Kayla Good finds that children as young as seven can hold this belief. Some people are concerned about being rejected, which can be embarrassing and painful. Others may be concerned about burdening and inconveniencing others-a topic I recently explored. These concerns may feel more relevant in some contexts than others, but they are all very relatable and very human.

The good news is those concerns are oftentimes exaggerated and mistaken.

**Q: What do people misunderstand about asking for help?**

**A:** When people are in need of

help, they are often caught up in their own concerns and worries and do not fully recognize the prosocial motivations of those around them who are ready to help. This can introduce a persistent difference between how help-seekers and potential helpers consider the same helping event. To test this idea, we conducted several experiments where people either directly interacted with each other to seek and offer help, or imagined or recalled such experiences in everyday life. We consistently observed that help-seekers underestimated how willing strangers and even friends would be to help them and how positive helpers would feel afterward, and overestimated how inconvenienced helpers would feel.

These patterns are consistent with work by Stanford psychologist Dale Miller showing that when thinking about what motivates other people, we tend to apply a more pessimistic, self-interested view about human nature. After all, Western societies tend to value independence, so asking others to go out of their way to do something for us may seem wrong or selfish and may impose a somewhat negative experience on the helper.

The truth is, most of us are deeply prosocial and want to make a positive difference in others' lives. Work by Stanford psychologist Jamil Zaki has shown that empathizing with and helping others in need seems to be an intuitive response, and dozens of studies, including my own, have found that people often feel happier after conducting acts of kindness.

**Q: Why is asking for help particularly important?**

**A:** We love stories about spontaneous help, and that may explain why random acts of kindness go viral on social media. But in

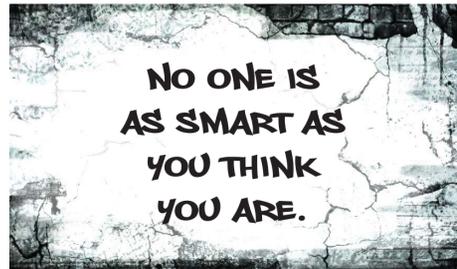
reality, the majority of help occurs only after a request has been made. It's often not because people don't want to help and must be pressed to do so. Quite the opposite, people want to help, but they can't help if they don't know someone is suffering or struggling.

**Q: It feels like some requests for help may be harder to ask than others. What does research say about different types of help, and how can we use those insights to help us figure out how we should ask for help?**

**A:** Many factors can influence how difficult it may feel to ask for help. Our recent research has primarily focused on everyday scenarios where the other person is clearly able to help, and all you need is to show up and ask. In some other cases, the kind of help you need may require more specific skills or resources. As long as you make your request specific, meaningful, action-oriented, realistic, and Time-bound (also known as the SMART criteria), people will likely be happy to help and feel good after helping. Of course, not all requests have to be specific. When we face mental health challenges, we may have difficulty articulating what kind of help we need. It is okay to reach out to mental health resources and take the time to figure out how we can get together. They are there to help, and they are happy to help.



## THE WALL



## BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

## ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman