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La Niña could give way to ‘super’ El Niño

Sarah Henry

Arizona Republic | USA TODAY NETWORK

After a record-warm winter and a spring heat wave, La Niña said her farewell last month as sea surface temperatures in the Pacific Ocean returned to normal. Now forecasters are predicting a strong swing in the other direction — a “super” El Niño that could bring much-needed relief to the Southwest’s relentless drought.

Warmer waters are brewing in the equatorial Pacific signaling an important shift in the planet’s impending weather patterns. On April 9, the National Weather Service said there was a 61% chance of La Niña’s temperamental counterpart arriving as early as June.

The Earth seesaws between the two on an irregular schedule. The last time El Niño showed up, in 2023, sea surface temperatures along the equator in the Pacific rose 1.5 degrees Celsius above normal. But this year’s El Niño could be more intense than that — there’s a 25% chance sea surface temperatures could reach 2 degrees above average.

Over the past 80 years, there have only been a handful of El Niño events as strong as what this year’s is predicted to be.

In the Southwest, the correlation between El Niño and precipitation depends largely on the strength of the event, according to NOAA. The stronger the

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The sun rises on March 18 on what was the earliest 100-degree day in Phoenix weather history.

ROB SCHUMACHER/THE REPUBLIC

War negotiations on shaky ground



People walk near an anti-U.S. billboard in Tehran, Iran, on April 20. A two-week ceasefire between the United States and Iran is set to expire on April 22. MAJID ASGARIPUR/WEST ASIA NEWS AGENCY VIA REUTERS

Talks are uncertain after U.S. seizes Iranian ship

Kathryn Palmer, Adrianna Rodriguez and Francesca Chambers

USA TODAY

Iran is considering attending peace talks with the United States in Pakistan, a senior Iranian official told Reuters on April 20, following moves by Islamabad to end a U.S. blockade of Iran’s ports, a major hurdle for Iran to rejoin peace efforts. However, the official stressed that no decision had been made.

With a two-week ceasefire set to expire on April 22, a senior Iranian official said Tehran was “positively reviewing” its participation but no final decision had been made. The comments conveyed a clear change of tone from earlier statements ruling out attendance and pledging to retaliate for U.S. aggression.

The Iranian official said mediator Pakistan was

making positive efforts to end the U.S. blockade and ensure Iran’s participation.

The ceasefire had appeared in jeopardy after the United States said it had seized an Iranian cargo ship on April 19 that tried to evade its blockade in the Strait of Hormuz and Tehran vowed to retaliate.

The U.S. military said it had fired on the Iranian-flagged cargo ship headed toward Iran’s Bandar Abbas port after a six-hour standoff, disabling its engines. U.S. Central Command released video showing Marines descending on ropes from helicopters onto the vessel.

In a Truth Social post, Trump said U.S. forces damaged and seized the Iranian ship, saying that the United States has “full custody” of the vessel.

“The Iranian crew refused to listen, so our Navy ship stopped them right in their tracks by blowing a hole in the [engine room],” Trump wrote on April 19. He added that the ship was sanctioned for what he called a “prior history of illegal activity.”

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Surprise ICE facility unlikely to open on time

Elena Santa Cruz

Arizona Republic | USA TODAY NETWORK

The planned ICE center for processing immigrant detainees in Surprise appears unlikely to open by the agency’s September target date.

A DHS representative told Jodi Tas, Surprise’s government relations director, that the change in leadership within the department and a lack of secured funding amid the partial government shutdown have delayed the project, according to city spokesperson Virginia Mungovan.

“They said it would likely be later,” Mungovan said in an email.

An unidentified DHS spokesperson did not address a pause or delay in an email. The department was “reviewing agency policies and proposals,” just like in any leadership transition, a nod to Markwayne Mullin’s takeover in March.

DHS, under its former leader Kristi Noem, bought a 418,400-square-foot warehouse near Dysart Road and Sweetwater Avenue for more than \$70 million in January. GardaWorld Federal Services LLC, a private security firm, was contracted to renovate the building, which is expected to hold about 550 beds. It was previously set to have 1,500 beds.

The idea of an ICE immigration center near schools and neighborhoods has drawn backlash from residents in and out of Surprise, who have demanded that the City Council take a strong stance against it. People have packed council meetings and have protested on weekends and, most recently, outside the city’s State of the City presentation.

Mayor Kevin Sartor has said he didn’t know whether pushing back would result in anything meaningful. City officials’ new relationships with DHS and ICE have put the city in the best position going forward, according to Sartor.

A spokesperson for Republican U.S. Rep. Paul Gosar, who represents the area of the city where the warehouse is, said the congressman was in constant contact with ICE officials and “all indications” were that the facility was still in the works. Anthony Foti said it was known that ICE’s timelines were not final and that there could be minor delays due to permitting, contractors and other factors.

The delay is why Surprise leaders would not be weighing how to fight the project at their next meeting on April 21, even though a councilmember had initially requested that they do.

Chris Judd, whose district includes the federal government’s building, said near the end of a long April 7 council meeting that he wanted an agenda

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TRAFFIC CAMERA LAWS PAGE 3A



An attorney offers some advice if you get a Phoenix speed camera ticket. MARK HENLE/THE REPUBLIC

Ousted exec fights back

The fired CEO of Mesa-based Copa Health, sued by her former employer in late March, says she’s the target of a smear campaign and that the lawsuit’s claims should play out in private arbitration, not in public court. 4A

Memorable site

The Snoopy Rock in the glowing red cliffs of Sedona is the kind of landmark that makes many do a double take. 1C



The Department of Homeland Security bought a warehouse near Dysart Road and Sweetwater Avenue in Surprise for more than \$70 million in January. However, the idea of an ICE immigration center near neighborhoods and schools has drawn backlash. DIANNIE CHAVEZ/THE REPUBLIC FILE

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