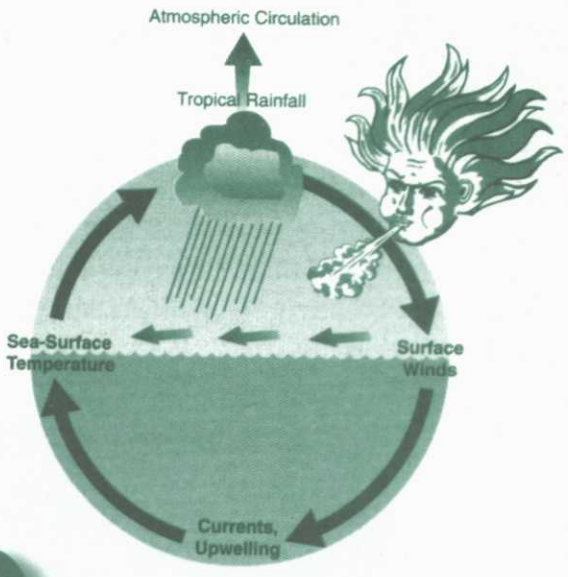
death, the problem of landslides and avalanches became increasingly important during that period. Generally associated with extreme hydrometeorological conditions and soil oversaturation, many of these phenomena are aggravated by poor environmental management and deforestation in many densely populated areas, both rural and urban.

Meanwhile, droughts tend to have a slower impact on health conditions by affecting the food supply. The drought that ravaged Peru in 1992 caused an estimated 300 million dollars in agricultural losses and affected over a million people. In Bolivia, the 1994 drought seriously affected 50,000 inhabitants of the city of Potosi.

The phenomenon of urban drought is poised to become a major problem in the future. The pollution and exhaustion of aquifers and superficial water sources would affect very densely populated areas.

Considering all this, there is a clear need to pay careful attention to awareness-raising, monitoring and early warning systems, and mitigation and preparedness measures required to face such disasters in the years to come.■

El Niño IS BACK



Source: NOAA

When Peruvian fishermen began to notice shrimp and lobsters in their waters, they knew they were in trouble. The ocean's temperature was beginning to rise, and the groupers and hakes they would normally catch were fleeing South in search of colder waters. All were tell-tale signs of the return of "El Niño".

From February onwards, along the coastlines of Chile, Peru and Ecuador, the sea's surface temperature has indeed experienced a greater warming than would normally be expected: this heralds the return of "El Nino", the common name for sea surface temperature anomalies along the Western coast of South America which bring about climate changes around the world, directly affecting people's health, the economy and the environment.

Early on in this century, it was discovered that when the