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Schools
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Hydropower
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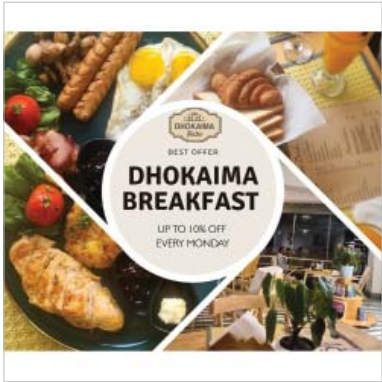
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A disastrous state of affairs

Nepal's flood crisis comes on the first anniversary of the GenZ movement, leaving a new government to deal with it

Editorial

Sonia Awale

Its sheer scale may have been a shock, but the Trisuli Disaster last week was not unexpected. Scientists have been warning of such calamities for decades. But an accountable and open government can prevent a disaster such as this from turning into a catastrophe.

The aftermath of this flood coincides with the first anniversary of the 8-9 September GenZ movement and the regime change that it brought about after the election in March.

Six months into office, Prime Minister Balendra Shah's government has to deal with a disaster that presents an even greater humanitarian and economic crisis than the 2015 earthquake. This calamity would be a challenge even for countries well prepared to handle disasters.

This anniversary would have been a time to look into who was responsible for turning a peaceful rally against corruption into a massacre of 19 students outside Parliament on 8 September, and the deadly arson and mayhem that followed the next day.

It would have been a time to take stock of the performance of the RSP government so far. But all that has to be set aside for now.

Nepal is a disaster-prone country, and being relatively new in national government, the RSP has been heaped with an enormous challenge. How it deals with the needs of the neediest will be its biggest test.

The management of casualties, finding



AMIT MACHAMASI



SUMAN NEPALI

and identifying bodies need urgency, and the stench along the Trisuli is an overpowering proof of that. Local government need help providing food, water, clothes, cooking material for those in temporary shelters.

The national government can then turn its attention to long-term rehabilitation and reviving the economy of this energy, trade and tourism corridor.

Although climate breakdown and global heating may have been the trigger for this disaster, the death toll is so high in the lack of zoning laws to prevent unregulated settlement along vulnerable floodplains. Infrastructure plans did not take into account climate impact on an already fragile mountain range.

Building cascade hydropower plants on a single river basin is an obsolete concept.

Projects need to be decentralised to spread the risk from future floods. There should be more but smaller plants, and the energy source must be diversified. This is self-evident for a multi-hazard country with the co-risk of seismicity and climate change.

It is all well and good for the government to demand reparations from the UN's Loss and Damage Fund, but it is unlikely to materialise with the speed and amount that Nepal needs right away. We are on this on our own, and the test will be in how well we act on moving people and plants out of harm's way before another disaster on a glacier-fed river.

Before the floods, the government despite its popularity on social media was under increasing scrutiny for its high-handed and opaque decision-making,

with the PMO and the ministries working at cross purposes as if the spirit of the GenZ movement was forgotten once the leaders it installed got to power.

Even now, there have been insensitive and unhelpful remarks by ministers about local governments. This is no time for blame game, elected representatives at municipality and ward levels are closest to the people, and have the local knowledge to help in rescue and rehab. Sidelining them for political reasons is not the way to go at a time like this.

Twelve years ago was a 7.8M earthquake, 2024 was the Rosi Flood, last year it was the violence and destruction of 8-9 September. It is always one battle after another as Nepal lurches from one crisis to the next.

But this is a chance for the RSP to actually prove that it is different from those it replaced, and can heal and repair. 🇳🇵

Trending Online



Nepal avalanche was live on drone camera

By Kunda Dixit
A drone operator based at a mountaintop radar station in China seems to have inadvertently recorded a video of the ice-rock avalanche as it happened 5,000m on the mountains across the river on the Nepal side. Read analysis at nepalitimes.com.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Headlines on a climate deadline

By Kaede Polkinghorne
Two designers took a red pen to some news headlines plucked from international outlets, calling attention to the failure of mainstream western media to confidently connect the Bhote Kosi flood to climate change.

Most popular on X



Reporter's diary 27 August

By Suman Nepali
Nepali Times photographer Suman Nepali found his camera inadequate to capture the scale of the tragedy on the ground in Nuwakot. See photos and read his observations on our website.

Most commented

Not if, but when next?

by Sonia Awale
Not since the 2015 earthquake has Nepal seen a disaster of this magnitude. No one could have predicted this disaster would happen when it did. But anyone could have said it was bound to happen one day. Editorial by Sonia Awale online.

Most visited online page

Letters

Maybe we should all be looking at what we can do to prevent the next one. My heart goes out to all the people there. (Reporter's Diary 27 August', Suman Nepali, nepalitimes.com)

Tina Lynn

Human actions have raised global temperatures, effectively making Nature's task easier. Climate change is a huge challenge for humanity. If humanity is to choose survival, it must learn to live with fewer possessions and attain self-realization.

Pragna Kukadia Patel

A tragedy of gargantuan proportions. Apocalyptic for those folks impacted, for the communities impacted.

Kyle Laurel Turner

And yet, experts have been warning the Nepalese authorities over the past 30 years about these very same natural disasters were inevitable--even after last year's similar flooding in this very same river system valley's. What did these authorities actually do to relocate all those poorest of Nepali nationals up and out of those "high-risk" flood zone land pockets---the cheapest land available they could afford---and relocate their homes up and out of that valley system? The authorities did nothing. Why not?

Andrew Stewart

No one is now immune from either mega floods, mega fires, mega storms or mega droughts. We are all in this fight together. ('We are all downstream now', Zakir Kibria, #1326)

Peter Craven

Rivers often flow at the bottom of steep sided ravines and valleys. Those were carved over millennia by events like this. I agree we may have speeded this phase of planetary change by misuse of minerals etc, but the Holocene was only ever going to be a phase not a destination

Jenny Barron

For so long we have taken our home for granted, and every natural disaster kills more and more. Better to think 'when' instead of 'what if'.

Kevin Day

Nature will always have her way but unfortunately the innocent need to suffer due to the greed of many people and corporations and governments. So stupid to put money before the environment. Shame there is so much either ignorance or non intelligence in this beautiful world that is our gift.

Kristine Coutts

Even if the drone operator had spotted the brown cloud, and understood what it meant, I very much doubt that his cellphone worked up there. ('Nepal avalanche was live on drone camera', Kunda Dixit, nepalitimes.com)

Richard Barran

Rasuwa flood was not just a warning to fix our early warning systems but a signal to the globe to keep their climate promises and lower the emission immediately and drastically. ('Nepal disaster was a warning to fix its early-warning system', Devesh Belbase, nepalitimes.com)

Mishra Sahra O Positive

Saw a video of rescuers digging out a little girl. Brought tears seeing how she survived. ('Heartbreak and hope go together in Nepal', Sonia Awale, page 3)

Nancy Proctor

Ice WILL melt. Glaciers WILL disappear. Some will collapse catastrophically. The permafrost WILL melt. That WILL release huge amounts of extra GHGs. That WILL cause more warming. We've been telling you this for decades. It doesn't matter how much you pretend it isn't happening. That won't stop it.

Harry Gordon

Enough with the climate change. Glacier collapses have been happening for thousands of years. Caused by time, pressure and gravity.

Paul Hoffman

Cutting down trees and mountains, emitting carbon, polluting rivers, and controlling the flow of upstream water by building dams in the name of development; and expecting nature to tolerate everything silently! Due to lack of compassion for nature, we will have to see such destruction in the future as well. ('Nepal must prepare for weather extremes', Ngamidra Dahal, nepalitimes.com)

Anik Khan

Thank you for Nepali Times for putting the record straight and the map of the avalanche on the north face of Langtang. Sinophones around the world are hell-bent on tackling China, which has done more to switch to renewables than any other country. Been happening for thousands of years. Caused by time, pressure and gravity.

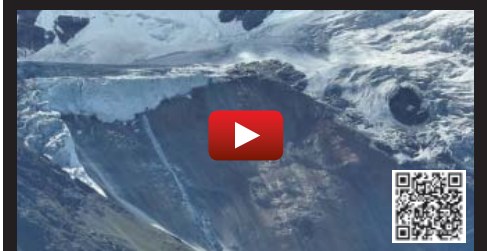
Abdel Khan

Online Package



CLIMATE MIGRATION

Communities are deeply dependent on water resources not only for drinking but also to sustain their livelihoods. What happens when the water resources are no longer reliable? .



IMPERMANENT FROST

The rapid thawing of the Himalayan ice-cap is compounded by the little-studied melting of permafrost that destabilises peaks. Relevant in light of last week's central Nepal flood.



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Heartbreak and hope

Survivors and families of the missing want news of loved ones, either dead or alive



Sonia Awale

Talk of death is everywhere at a Kathmandu hospital: “Is he still recognisable?”, “How do we keep the body from decomposing?”, “It has been several days, there is no chance she is alive.”

There are no stories here of miraculous survival. Yet, families milling around in the evening rain waiting outside Teaching Hospital this week still hope against hope. Many are resigned to fate, and are preparing for the worst. Now, they just want news of a body found so they can get closure.

Others have lost patience, are fed up with narrating their story repeatedly, and avoid reporters with cameras. We keep our distance, respecting the privacy of survivors and sympathise with their trauma — many themselves escaped death by hair’s breadth.

“Will your cameras bring our people back?” one woman asks a team of aggressive foreign correspondents filming their tears. Her relatives try to console her.

Dil Kumari Masrangi Magar is posting photos of her brother-in-law and a nephew at the hospital gate, next to dozens of other pictures of the dead, and long printouts of missing names. She tells us to share the story with the world, maybe someone somewhere has seen them.

“There is nothing left to do but



ALL PHOTOS: SUMAN NEPALI

hope,” she tells us quietly. “Even if it’s just their bodies, at least we’d know.”

Nearby, Dirgha Maya Kulami Magar joins the conversation. Her nephew is missing. She had called him three times that morning before the flood came, but he did not pick up.

Both women and their families are originally from Udaypur. Their relatives were working in Rasuwa on the morning of 26 August, and are among nearly over 4,200 people in Nepal who are still unaccounted for. Another 500 are missing in China from the mud surge that engulfed the Trisuli River.

There are one or two rare stories of survival. Last Friday, rescuers heard a feeble cry from under the

ruddle of a destroyed house in Timure near the Chinese border. They frantically dug through the mud and pulled out six-year-old, Manisha.

More than 200 hydropower plant workers were rescued by the Nepali Army from tunnels, but hundreds more are missing from the 12 projects along the Trisuli and its tributaries. Chinese and Indian teams with specialised equipment are working against time to reach those trapped.

WALL OF MUD

Some are desperate enough to consider chartering a private helicopter to search for their people, even though officials discourage it as a waste of resources

because the government needs the choppers for its own rescue priorities.

Subash Tamang went to Dhunche to search for his missing relatives who were all tourist bus operators. Two were leaving after dropping off a batch of visitors at the border, and they were still in touch till 8:31AM — half an hour before the wall of mud came crashing down.

He had gone to Chitwan to see if the bodies were swept down there, and now is in Kathmandu. We overhear him telling a police officer: “I keep dreaming that they might be in a certain location, waiting to be rescued. If only we could take a heli.”

Then he turns to us and says with desperation in his voice, “With the help of journalists like you we hope to find them soon.”

Nepal’s official death toll is based on the number of bodies found, and currently stands at 1,252, but that number is sure to increase -- making this the worst disaster since the 2015 earthquake that also struck this region badly.

One family finally coming to terms with the loss is Kesari Tamang. She has been visiting the hospital every day, and this evening we find her examining the picture of a body very closely. There is a ring on one finger, just like the one her brother Sankha Budha used to wear.

He was running a restaurant next to one of the bridges that was swept away in Betrawati. At the police desk, she was also told the

body was about 5.6ft, and he had a fair complexion.

But because the body was recovered in Kapilvastu, Tamang and the family prepared to travel to the morgue at Pipra Hospital to identify it and arrange for the funeral.

“If we start early tomorrow, we will reach in about 10-11 hours. If it’s not him, we will just come back, but it looks like it is him,” another relative says with a deep sigh.

The photographs of the dead are disturbing, and some have questioned the practice of posting the graphic images in public. But for the families this is the only identification method possible for now.

Then we come across a group of girls, closely resembling each other, all looking for information on their only brother Santosh Thing Tamang, 23. The eldest of eight sisters, Shanti Maya Tamang, tells us they are waiting for the hospital to bring out a fresh batch of photos of bodies that arrived that day.

Santosh was working as a barista in a cafe near the Nepal-China border and was coming to Kathmandu on a holiday via Kerung when the disaster struck. He had left at 7:30AM Nepal time and would have been at the border when the flood struck.

“He had taken five days off to spend Raksha Bandhan with us sisters,” Shanti Maya tells us. “Our parents keep calling us, asking if we found our brother. We keep going around but we can’t find his photo or name on any list here. He is not in Bidur camp either. We tried TikTok, too.”

The sisters work and study in Kathmandu and live in a rented room. Their parents are in Bhotle in Rasuwa, which is higher up the mountain so they are safe. But the road to the village has been swept away, so they cannot travel.

Shanti Maya has run out of tears, and has spent all her hope. She adds in a monotone: “My family is safe, but all villages are all gone, there is no one left.” 🇳🇵



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SUMAN NEPALI

Building back better and safer

Post-disaster economic recovery is an opportunity to make the country more climate resilient and sustainable

Shristi Karki

One week after the catastrophic Himalayan tsunami that tore through the Nepal-Tibet border and swept away entire villages downstream across five districts, the country is coming to terms with the human and economic cost of the disaster.

At press time on Thursday, the death toll had exceeded 1,200, with more than 4,500 people still unaccounted for in Nepal and China.

While the response to last week's flood from foreign governments, multilateral agencies, and the international community has still centered on assistance and grants, the government in a letter to the newly established UN-backed Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD) this week has claimed climate reparation.

Finance Minister Shisir Khanal told Kantipur that Nepal's post-disaster relief and rehabilitation must not be measured in bilateral aid or multilateral grants, but in terms of climate justice. He added that industrialised nations and major emitters have a moral and legal obligation towards Nepal.

On Wednesday, Prime Minister Balendra Shah in a rare address to Parliament after assuming office six months ago also said: "The entire world has contributed to climate change. Mitigating and managing its impact is therefore the shared responsibility of the international community."

While Nepal has a strong moral and scientific claim to climate compensation, the challenge lies in building a data and evidence-backed international case that the disaster was caused by climate breakdown.

"International aid is generally provided voluntarily as humanitarian assistance, whereas climate compensation or reparations imply a much stronger recognition of responsibility and liability by major historical and current emitters," explains

economist Meen Poudyal Chhetri of the Nepal Centre for Disaster Management. "That remains politically and legally difficult under the present international climate regime."

To make its case stronger, Nepal now requires systematic documentation of economic and livelihood losses, infrastructure damage, disruption of education and health services, environmental losses, long-term recovery costs, as well as robust climate and disaster attribution science demonstrating how anthropogenic climate change has contributed to increasing the underlying risk.

"The global commitment to climate change is inefficient," adds environmental economist Arjun Dhakal. "While the scale and transboundary nature of this tragedy has created global pressure and hopes for positive climate-responsible outcomes, how much the biggest global economies are willing to compromise will be decided by their internal politics."

Nepal's case may also be complicated by the fact that the past governments did not prevent the expansion of settlements along vulnerable floodplains, and due to its cascade of hydropower plants as well as highways along glacier-fed rivers known to be in a high-risk zone. Many of Nepal's problems are a result of political and governance failures and pre-date climate change.

MAJOR SETBACK

The RSP government has been in power only six month after last year's youth protest (Editorial, page 2). It had ambitious plans to expand Nepal's economy, attract investment and create jobs. Now, it must immediately confront post-disaster losses that will amount to billions.

"This disaster has dealt a significant blow to an already vulnerable economy still reeling from the impact of the 2015 earthquake and last year's revolt," says Dhakal. "It is a major setback."

Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle estimates that post-disaster

recovery could top \$5 billion, but this is an initial estimate. Other experts say the overall economic cost when recovery and rebuilding are factored in could exceed the impact of the 2015 earthquake, which cost \$7-\$10 billion.

The Independent Power Producers' Association, Nepal (IPPAN) has said that losses to the hydropower sector alone could amount to as much as \$200 million (page 5). The destruction of a vital trade, tourism, and transport corridor will mean that the cost of the disaster will reverberate across Nepal's economy, from soaring prices of consumer goods, electricity, aviation, as well as the insurance, reinsurance, and stock market.

The flood has either destroyed or dealt extensive damage to at least 40km of roads, and over 40 motorable bridges. Weakened by the floodwaters, a section of the Prithvi Highway at Krishnabhir collapsed into the Trisuli earlier this week. Meanwhile, at least 12 run-of-river hydropower projects, both operational and under construction, with a combined capacity of 669MW have been damaged. The 25MW solar plant in Nuwakot, Nepal's biggest project of its kind, was also affected.

The flood has impacted up to 90,000 people across thousands of households in fifty-four wards across Rasuwa, Nuwakot, Dhading, Tanahu. In more than a dozen affected wards, entire villages and major local markets along the river corridor have been entirely wiped out.

Experts say that the country's road, energy, and urbanisation have not accounted for its geography and terrain. For instance, even as more than 30 motorable bridges were swept away by the flood, the Mugling bridge, which was also directly on the path of the flood, remained intact due to its concrete elevated structural design and steel and concrete arch framework.

The Super Trisuli hydropower project also only sustained minor

damage, which its surveyor attributed to the flood-probability assessment carried out before construction, and its location away from the direct flow of the river.

"The scale of this disaster is not just attributable to climate change, but also to our negligence in building infrastructure," notes Dhakal. "We have the knowledge and technology to build climate-resilient infrastructure, but we have compromised on safety. This is a policy as well as engineering failure."

Much of Nepal's roads, settlements, and hydropower projects are built along major river corridors without comprehensive hazard and risk assessments. The Trisuli corridor alone has 34 hydropower projects including on its tributaries.

"Recovery should be guided by transparent damage assessments, risk-informed planning and resilient infrastructure standards," says Chhetri. "We should not continue placing expensive infrastructure and settlements in highly exposed river corridors simply because those locations are economically convenient."

Economists say that Nepal also needs spatial and energy diversification to minimise risks to energy infrastructure, and introduce zoning laws that keep people from building on floodplains. This disaster provides an opportunity for Nepal to start from scratch and make the Bhoté Kosi-Trisuli corridor a national model for climate-resilient infrastructure and economic planning, they add.

This means redesigning vulnerable hydropower and transport infrastructure, strengthening early-warning and real-time river monitoring, ensuring safe evacuation routes, and relocating settlements and critical facilities from high-risk riverbanks to safer areas. Integration of satellite technology, seismic and GNSS monitoring, glacier and permafrost observation, river gauges and community-based warning systems is also necessary.

"Most importantly, 'Build Back Better' should mean 'Build Back Safer,'" Chhetri adds. The lessons from this flood should be applied systematically across Nepal's mountain and river corridors so that economic development does not create new disaster risks."

YOUR VISIT MATTERS

This tragedy has come as Nepalis prepare to celebrate the festival season from next month onwards. The impact on trade is significant because the flood swept away the Trisuli-Rasuwigadi-Gyirong road to China which is the second most important cargo route after Birganj. On Tuesday, China also indefinitely shut off the Tatopani trading post citing new flood risks.

The flood has also led to the collapse in two places of the Prithvi Highway linking Kathmandu to Pokhara, Birganj and Dhangadi. The Department of Roads has in the meantime opened multiple alternate access roads, and says repairs will take weeks. Then on Wednesday morning, a section of the Nagdhunga-Naubise road collapsed, further impacting access to the capital. Traffic except trucks carrying fuel and two-wheelers have been diverted to the recently-opened Nagdhunga tunnel.

The blow to the transportation network is set to raise the cost of consumer goods, air travel, and deprive hundreds of people working across the trade, transport, and tourism networks.

Some trekking outfits and hotels have reported cancellations by tourists for the autumn season, as news from the Nepal disaster went global. But tour operators say the rest of Nepal is still open and preparing to receive visitors, adding that the best way to help Nepal economically is to visit the country. On Wednesday, Nepal Tourism Board put out a call for visitors to travel to the rest of the country, saying it would stimulate the local economy with the tagline: 'Your Visit Matters'.

'The Nepal flood disaster is pretty much localized to fairly small upper Trishuli and Bhoté Kosi valleys with the vast majority of the country living business as usual,' wrote Czech tour operator Michal Thoma on social media. "There is little to none reason to avoid Nepal travel."

But while the macroeconomic impact is significant, the economic cost to the thousands of Nepalis is immense. Survivors across central Nepal have not only lost their loved ones, but their homes, agricultural lands, livelihood, employment, as well as access to markets.

Bustling local trade hubs including Rasuwa's Timure and Syafrubesi as well as the historic Trisuli and Betrawati now lie buried in sediment. Survivors with no other housing and livelihood options could have no choice but to migrate to cities, or abroad.

"The reconstruction effort will present local employment opportunities, and skilled and semi-skilled human resources must be absorbed into recovery efforts," says Dhakal. "And river corridors could revert back to various forms of agriculture."

Nepal's economic recovery now must not just focus on large-scale infrastructure, but must also provide support to survivors so that they can rebuild their lives and livelihoods.

Says Chhetri: "Losing family members, homes, farmland and livelihoods, while also being cut off from markets, can push already vulnerable families into debt and poverty. People need support to rebuild their homes, restore livelihoods, restart agriculture and small businesses, and regain access to markets and essential services. Recovery assistance should reach affected families quickly, fairly and transparently, with special attention to the most vulnerable." 🇳🇵

Putting all its eggs in one basket is not a good idea in an age of climate breakdown

The disaster has also rattled the financial market. Several private power producers have seen their share prices plummet this week, as the scale of the disaster and damage to plants became apparent. Investors are now concerned over plants having to be written off, reconstruction costs, as well as what this means to hydropower



Most hydropower projects in Nepal are covered by insurance, allowing developers to claim compensation equivalent to project costs. However, such claims are subject to the fine print and specific conditions and may not fully address delays, lost revenue or

Power from the Rasuwa-Nuwakot corridor is evacuated through the Trishuli-3B 220-kV substation which was damaged, and several transmission pylons came down.

“Future projects must be decentralised to minimise the risk of disasters, smaller projects must be spread out,” says senior watershed expert Madhukar

He told us: "Early warning systems must be made more robust and alternate routes for evacuation must be established so that human loss can be minimised." 🇵🇰



Trisuli on my mind



In March, my father walked through Trisuli Bazar, entering shops, greeting passersby, and shaking hands with past schoolmates, childhood friends, and acquaintances. He had a spring in his step.

My father, Baa, had not been back for over 50 years since going to school there. My grandparents were based in Trisuli almost their entire working lives: my grandmother, a staff nurse at the Trisuli Hospital and my grandfather, a supervisor at the Trisuli Hydropower Station.

Baa often wonders why his parents moved to Trisuli, abandoning the comfort of their Kathmandu life. Life in Trisuli meant walking in scorching heat on mostly hilly terrain to get to work, school, hospital, or market. The bazar overlooking the river it takes its name from, is backed by settlements sprawling on the hills above.



The main Bazar was swept away last week. Five months earlier, we had been eating lunch around a big table at my great aunt Nini-Aji’s home. The sound of Trisuli River 30m away was the background score.

Mamu asked Nini-Aji if she ever felt scared to sleep with the river so close. She said she was so used to the sound, she would miss it if she went to Kathmandu. “The river never comes all the way up,” she said.

Last Wednesday, when we heard about the flood, our first concern was Nini-Aji, who is 86 and uses a walker. We found out she had been driven to higher ground.

She and many others were moved to Trisuli Colony which was built by India in 1967. My father and his siblings spent their childhood there because of their parents’ jobs. As a child, I would be bussed off to Trisuli during winter holidays. It was warmer than Kathmandu. Days were slow.

My grandparents lived in one of the semi-detached apartments with a spacious front porch and a big backyard where they grew vegetables, papaya, guava, and sugarcane. In winter, we ate oranges and peanuts in the sun. The rice came from fields nearby, as did the dal. There was enough fish from the river.

A musician who moonlighted as supervisor, my grandfather would play his sitar in the drawing room on evenings. Occasionally, a friend from the bazar would join him on the tabla and the house would reverberate with their dual melody.

On every trip, I would carry loaves of bread from Kathmandu. Trisuli did not have a bakery then. In return, they would pack my bag with all kinds of koseli. At the bus stand

at the bazar, my father’s childhood friend Khursheed Kaka would run up to the bus window and hand me a bunch of bangles. The prettiest bangles I ever wore.

There was no more Khursheed Kaka when we visited in March, but we did meet some of Baa’s other Muslim schoolmates. They greeted each other in Newa with an impeccable Kathmandu accent. We also ran into Pradeep uncle, who performs as the Lakhey during Janai Purnima.

There were other friends Baa sat down with, holding hands, saying he would come back for a longer visit, not knowing that a fateful day was on its way.

SUM OF MEMORIES

A former trading post for people from Rasuwa and Dhading, Trisuli Bazar had people from all backgrounds. The Ram Mandir, Tribhuvan Trisuli High School, the Mosque, and the Vihar were all along the river. One could just sprint over and dive in.

In March, we talked to some students at the school hostel, who said they came from far flung villages in Nuwakot and Rasuwa. We made several stops at houses by the river, meeting Baa’s and Nini’s former schoolmates.

During my visits as a child, Nini would sometimes take me to one of the video parlours where we would watch a Hindi film. Later, we would climb back to the colony, Nini singing songs from the film.

For Baa, Trisuli is synonymous to so much. It was where he bunked classes to go swimming and fishing in the river, where he first sat by the river professing his love to a school sweetheart, where he stole mangoes and guavas with siblings and friends, where he heard his first ghost story, and where many nights, he held the torch and followed his mother to the homes of villagers in pain.

For me, it was a summation of the memories of my family members who had lived there. On our recent trip, my mother kept marvelling at how pretty and green Trisuli had become. Roads were solid, hotels were nice. There were mobile phone stores and marts and kitchenware. Some fancy dress stores catered to Rasuwa residents, displaying silken wanjubakkhu and wollen kullu caps. The jewelry shops had some of the most intricate designs I ever saw.

As my brother drove us past the new Trisuli bridge, I looked at the river, feeling squeamish.

I have always felt a deep sense of fear near roaring rivers, like the sound comes bearing premonition.

In 2012, D J Clark and I followed ICIMOD specialist Pradeep Mool to the China-Nepal border on the other Bhote Kosi at Kodari to do a story about imminent GLOFs (Glacial Lake Outburst Floods). The warning about potential damage left my hands clammy as I interviewed residents along the border. The region had seen flash floods in the past.

A few years later, Rajneesh Bandari and I followed the route again for another story. During an interview, Ishwar Shrestha, a hotel owner, asked me if GLOFs could really happen. He said, even if it were true, he would never be able to abandon his home.

On 26 August, after we woke up to the horrific news of the flooding, Baa was glued to his phone, trying to contact relatives and childhood friends. Phones were down and updates were sketchy. Of all the friends he was trying to call, he could speak to just one: Dhruva Shrestha Uncle, who limps from a road accident injury. In March, Baa and he were sat at his shop behind Tribhuvan Trisuli High School, their hands gently resting on each other’s knees.

On Wednesday, he and his son were evacuated to Maithali Camp in Trisuli from the bazar as the flood filth surged. He said to Baa on the phone: “We couldn’t find my wife. She and the house are both gone. There’s nothing to say. We are without an address.” 🇳🇵

Suburban Tales is a monthly column in Nepali Times based on real people in Pratibha’s life.



REQUIEM FOR RASUWA





Nepal beyond the postcards.

Jessica Amity

We so often show Nepal through its mountains. Through snow-covered summits catching the first light. Through valleys so deep they make villages look like handfuls of stones scattered across the earth. Through prayer flags, trails and landscapes that seem almost impossibly beautiful.

But Nepal has never only been its mountains. Look a little closer and there are lives everywhere. A couple sitting in the doorway of the home they built a life inside. A mother carrying her child. Hands turning the earth that will feed a family. Rice being washed for a meal. Children appearing in a doorway to see who has arrived. Families sitting on the floor and eating together. The ordinary things that rarely make the postcards. And yet, to me, they are Nepal.

These photographs were not taken during the floods, and most were not taken in the communities directly affected. They are simply pieces of the Nepal I have been fortunate enough to know.

And looking at them now feels different. Because when we hear words like flood, landslide, glacier, missing, destroyed — it is easy for something so enormous to become numbers on a screen.

But behind every number is somebody's entire ordinary life. A bed that was slept in the night before. Clothes hanging behind a door. A cooking pot still sitting in a kitchen. A field someone planted by hand. A school route. A photograph on a wall. A cup of tea that was supposed to be poured that morning. A person who was expected home. For a country that has given me more than I could ever adequately put into words, it breaks my heart to be so far away from it right now.

There is a part of me that desperately wishes I were there. Not because I think I could fix something this enormous. I just wish I could carry something. Clear something. Make tea. Hold someone's hand. Do one small useful thing rather than watch a place I love hurting through a screen.

But this is not my tragedy. It belongs to the families waiting for news. To those who have lost someone. To those looking at a piece of land where their home once stood. To the people who will still be rebuilding when the rest of us have moved on to another headline.

We talk about the resilience of Nepali people so often. And they are resilient. Extraordinarily so. But I think sometimes we use that word because it makes suffering easier for the rest of us to look at.

Resilient people still hurt. Strong communities still need help. And people should not have to be extraordinary simply to survive extraordinary loss.

For everything Nepal has given me — friendship, belonging, generosity, mountains, laughter, meals around tables and cups of tea handed to me by people who had no reason to be so kind — I wish more than anything that I could give something back right now.

So I don't have anything profound to say. I simply don't want to look away. These are not photographs of a disaster. They are photographs of ordinary days. Of people working. Eating. Laughing. Raising children. Growing food. Sitting outside their homes. Living. Because behind every photograph coming out of Nepal right now, behind every statistic and every headline, there is another photograph like one of these. A before.

A whole life that existed before the world knew its name. If you can help, please help through verified organisations and local relief efforts. If you can share useful information, share it. And if all you can do is keep Nepal in people's minds a little longer, please do that too. Because eventually the headlines will move on. The photographs will disappear from our feeds. And somewhere in Nepal, someone will still be rebuilding the place they called home.



Photographer Jessica Amity grew up in Kathmandu and has spent much of her life living, working and travelling across Nepal. These photographs are from the Trisuli Valley before the 26 August catastrophe.



Events



Paubha Painting
Polish your skills through a 15-day paubha masterclass and learn this sacred Newa art form through guided, hands-on practice.
13–29 September, 7:30-9:30am, The Drawing Room, Gyanmandala, Jhamsikhel

Felting Memories of Culture
Visit the felt artwork exhibition, सुसम्भना: Felting Memories of Culture, where multiple artists showcase traditional craft into vivid personal and cultural narratives.
Until 20 September, 12pm-7pm, Sarvashresth Gallery, Swayambhu



Labim Bazaar
Indulge in wide varieties of bakeries and other delicacies, along with handicrafts, clothing and more.
Every Saturday, 10am-4pm, Labim Mall, Pulchok

What Empire Took, What Empire Left
Multiple artists and thinkers showcase their work centered on artefacts displaced from South Asia at the exhibit What Empire Took, What Empire Left. Read review on nepalitimes.com.
Until 31 October, Taragaon Next, Boudha

Bir Ganeshman
Watch 'Iron Man' and democratic leader Ganesh Man Singh's story depicted through drama and multiple characters.
Until 30 September, 5:15pm, Sarvanam Theatre, Kalikasthan



Crochet Workshop
Learn the basics of crochet in three days. Develop the skill of stitching, patterns and other techniques of crochet.
5-7 September, Rs2,999, 3pm-6pm, Manjari House of Arts, Patan

Paint for Animal
Join this free event for animal rights and be the voice of the voiceless. All the artworks created during the session will be showcased in the Kathmandu Animal Save's upcoming Nepal Vegan Gallery event.
5 September, 12pm-5pm, Kalashala, Sanepa



Music

Music for a Cause
Celebrate a musical evening with Casuals. They will be performing hip-hop, jazz, funk, metal and more music genres, with all the proceeds going to the Rasuwa floods victims.
4 September, Rs1,000, Moksh, Jhamsikhel

Hunterhood
Book your tickets for a musical extravaganza. Adrian Pradhan collective, Rato Rani, Sacar and others are performing.
12 September, Rs350, 2pm onwards, Brikuti Mandap



Monali Thakur
Bollywood playback singer Monali Thakur will be singing some of her most famous tracks next wek in Kathmandu.
12 September, Rs2,500, 9pm onwards, Club Nova, Thamel

Bollywood Night
Join 'Thumka and Shots', a Bollywood themed party and dance the night away.
5 September, Rs999, 7pm, Elevate Lounge and Club, New Road



Her Fest
Celebrate womanhood and music together with the beats of ISTRI's Band and DJ Suraj.
12 September, Rs999, 6pm onwards, Trisara, Lazimpat



Getaway



Temple Tree Resort and Spa
A peaceful place to stay, complete with a swimming pool, massage parlour and sauna, it'll be hard to leave once one gets here.
Gaurighat, Lakeside, Pokhara (61) 465819

Bandipur Kaushi Inn
A small, rustic place in the idyllic village of Bandipur, replete with cultural diversity and traditional architecture.
Bandipur, Tanahu (065) 520083



Dusit Thani Himalayan Resort
Escape from the hustle and bustle of the city with a stay nestled in the Himalayan foothills. Enjoy beautiful views of sunset and mindful moments with meditation, sound healing and yoga.
Dhulikhel, 9851373755

Hotel Heritage Bhaktapur
A Newari-style boutique hotel that incorporates the rich art and architecture of the ancient city of Bhaktapur. The culture starts and ends at the gate of the hotel.
Suryabinayak, Bhaktapur (01) 6611628

Shivapuri Heights Cottage
Enjoy lunch with fresh mountain air and quiet, unhurried surroundings overlooking the Kathmandu Valley. Pair your lunch with a short walk to the nearby Jamchen Vijaya Stupa, making it a perfect little escape from the city.
Budhanilkantha, 9846232271



Dining

Haadi Biryani
Their slow-cooked biryanis are seasoned with a secret spice blend and the clay pots that they come in enhances the experience.
Dilli Bazaar (01) 4438444

1905 Restaurant
Enjoy the live music along with grilled dishes and a fine selection of craft beers and wine.
25 May, Narayan Chaur, Naxal (01) 4411348



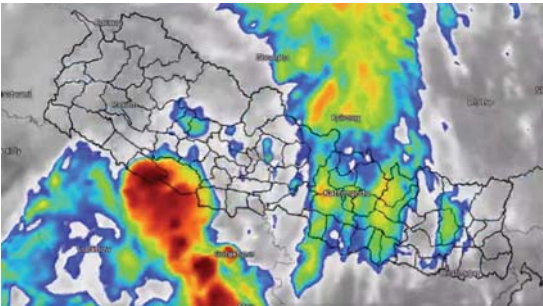
Fire and Ice
Fire and Ice offers genuine Napolitana pizza and dozens of variants to choose from. Try the paesane, a combination of mozzarella, spinach, courgette and bacon.
Thamel (01) 4250210

Jimbu Thakali
Not in the mood to cook? Head over to Jimbu and enjoy a healthy, tasty and traditional Thakali meal.
Baneswor (01) 4622423



The Belgian Waffle
Want something to satisfy your sweet tooth? Treat your taste buds from a wide range of waffle sundaes and Waff-wiches.
Darbar Marg, 9849636013

Weekend Weather



FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
27° 19°	27° 19°	27° 18°	28° 19°	28° 19°

Rain for Rasuwa
There seems to be no let up from over the weekend and beyond for Rasuwa and Nuwakot. This will hamper rescue flights, as well as efforts to repair roads leading to the affected towns and villages along the Trisuli. It will also increase the risk of further landslides not just in the disaster zone, but also downstream along the Prithvi Highway where the high water on the river has undermined the road embankment at Krishna Bhair, effectively cutting Kathmandu's lifeline to the west and south.



Our Pick

Directed by Yang Lina, Big World is a 2024 Chinese film following Liu Chunhe, a young man with cerebral palsy. As he overcomes physical and mental barriers on a journey to fulfill his grandmother's dream, he discovers his own purpose and undergoes a personal transformation. Starring Jackson Yee, Diana Lin, and Qingin Jiang, the film is available to watch on Netflix.

सामाजिक सञ्जाल प्रयोगमा सचेतता अपनाऔं

- सामाजिक सञ्जालमा अपरिचित व्यक्तिको साथी बन्ने अनुरोधलाई विश्वस्त भएर मात्र प्रतिक्रिया जनाऔं ।
- अपरिचित व्यक्तिलाई जथाभावी साथी बन्न अनुरोध नपठाऔं ।
- सामाजिक सञ्जाल तथा अन्य विद्युतीय माध्यमबाट चिड्छा पुरस्कार जस्ता आर्थिक प्रलोभनका प्रस्तावको भरमा नपरौं ।
- आफूले प्रवाह गरेका सन्देश वा सूचनाबाट समाजमा पर्नसक्ने नकारात्मक प्रभावको ख्याल गरौं ।
- आफ्नो सन्देशले कुनै व्यक्ति वा अन्य कुनै समुदायको आत्मसम्मानमा चोट नपुऱ्याऔं ।



नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

Headlines on a climate deadline

International media falters in linking Nepal flood to climate crisis

Kaede Polkinghorne

In coverage of the catastrophic Bhote Kosi flood, many mainstream western news outlets have failed to confidently state the significance of the climate crisis, or to cite the human-made structures that produce it.

Two days after catastrophic flooding began, designers Jain and Hamdani posted a carousel of headlines plucked from mainstream western news outlets on their Instagram.

By taking a red pen to each headline in the style of Alexandra Bell's Counternarratives series, Hamdani and Jain called attention to journalists' noncommittal tone, which served to obfuscate the connection between the Bhote Kosi flood and climate change.

The post went viral, with more than 32,000 likes at press time. In an accompanying article on Hamdani and Jain's shared Substack, Climate Without Borders, they write that news agencies "quote survivors' shock and panic" but not "experts' warning from decades past on the climate crisis."

"Ambiguity is always dangerous because it shies away from responsibility," Jain tells me. "It is the work of the media to bring attention to evidence that has been ignored for years now."

DENIALISM

While Hamdani and Jain call out mainstream western media for failing to establish a strong causal link between the flood, glacial collapse, and the warming atmosphere, some argue that western journalists are using climate change as “an explanation without evidence.”

That the Bhote Kosi flood is part of the broader climate crisis has been a common refrain over the past week, and one covered extensively by this paper. Glacial retreat and permafrost loss are well-recorded, documented impacts of climate change.

Scientists report that the collapse of the ice shelf on Langtang Lirung on 26 August was primarily because the bedrock below it gave way. Himalayan experts have linked the bedrock failure itself to the loss of permafrost in its fractures: ice that once cemented the rock has melted away due to record high temperatures this summer on the Tibetan Plateau.

Yet, scientific reports are dismissed both in the comments section and by some journalists, who sarcastically remark that climate change is “the all-purpose explanation for everything” or tentatively posit that “Glacier collapse and landslides are complex and can be caused by a number of factors.”

Climate change has become an



increasingly politicised, polarising issue in international media, especially in countries experiencing culturally pervasive conservative blowback like the United States and Germany.

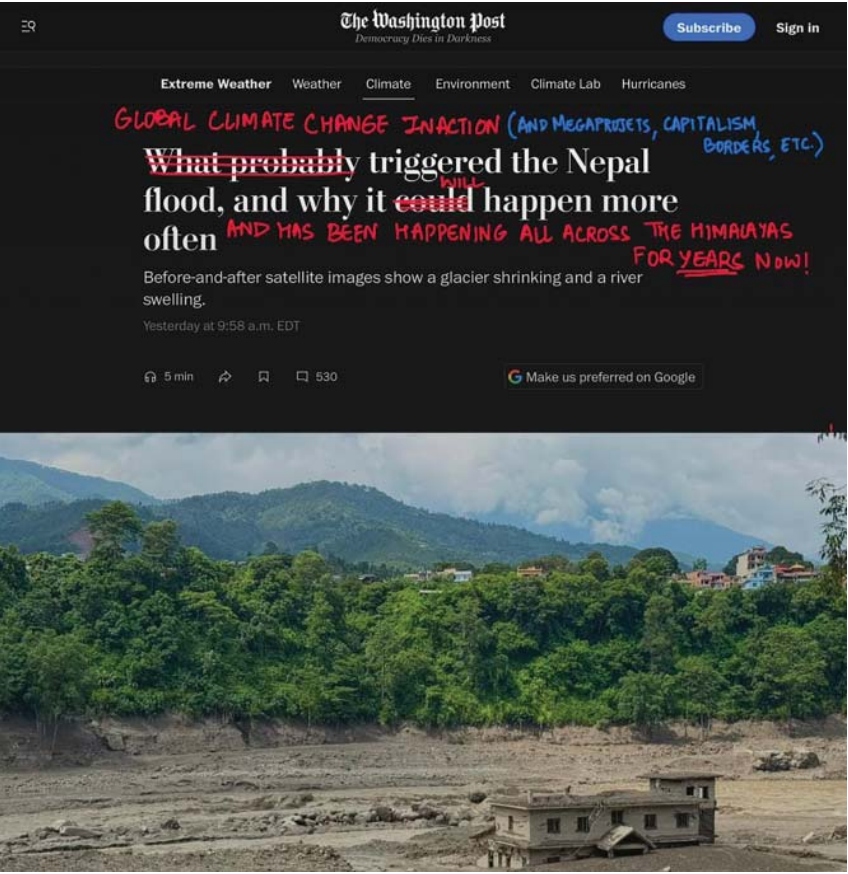
By noting the complexity of glacial collapse, pundits may hope to avoid taking a stand against partisan climate-deniers. Perhaps this is why Reuters, for instance, is still asking: “Was climate change to blame for the Nepal floods?”

However, this hesitance has the opposite effect. It amounts to an invitation for continued back-and-forth about whether burning fossil fuels is a significant factor in producing climate disasters — conversations that can quickly move away from harm, accountability, and reparation.

ACCOUNTABILITY

While confidently situating the Bhote Kosi flood within the climate crisis is necessary, it is also insufficient. Climate change is one link in a chain of impacts, not a root cause. The climate is not spontaneously choosing to change itself.

Overlapping structures of imperialism, colonialism, and modernity crafted and maintained by human-made choices weave the tangled web of heightened risks often referred to as the climate crisis. As a statement from the Kathmandu-based visual storytelling platform photo.circle reads, the climate crisis is “produced within a western capitalist

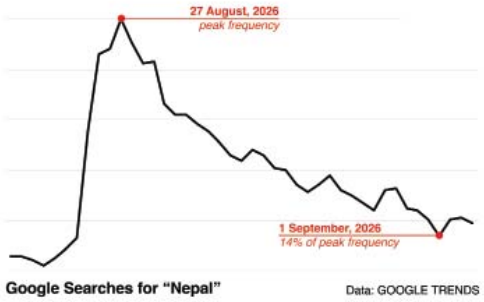


imperialist world order that continues to push us all to the brink and beyond.”

Some argue that Nepal's casualty rate was so high because of unregulated settlements along dynamic floodplains, not because of climate change. However, the human-made systems that have changed our climate are the same ones that push people to settle along vulnerable riverbanks. This is why, as Jain says, "the reporting needs to extend beyond disasters."

Many voices, including from mainstream western news outlets, have looked through a wider lens to note that Nepal's existential climate risks are disproportionate with its low greenhouse gas emissions. Observations like these are an entry point to deeper conversations about who is accountable and who carries the responsibility of repair.

However, when Ishan Tharoor writes in the *New Yorker* that these are “the floods



Nepal didn't cause," he only goes so far as to reassign blame to the climate itself — and the climate itself cannot be held accountable.

As Hamdani tells me, “The aid sent by western governments is disproportionate to their emissions, it is they who have caused these fragile ecosystems to collapse.”

MOVING ON

The death toll in Nepal is approaching 1,300, and another 4,500 people missing. Meanwhile, Google searches worldwide for 'Nepal' peaked on the day after the floodwaters hit and have already decreased by more than 80% since then.

Just as with the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, the international media and global interest will move on to the next disaster.

But will the same conversations resurface when that next disaster hits, or will news outlets confidently state how climate change contributed? Will they push past the obvious fact that people on the front lines of the climate crisis are virtually never responsible for its brutality? Will they finally ask who is accountable, and who carries the responsibility of repair?

“Western media needs to identify these events as the canary in the coal mine,” Fatima Hamdani says. “While countries which have contributed little-to-nothing in global carbon emissions are on the front lines of the climate crisis, western countries will soon follow.” 

Kaede Polkinghorne is an intern at Nepali Times.

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“This is by far the most horrific

Alton C Byers is a mountain geographer, conservationist, and researcher on Himalayan glaciers with the Institute for Arctic and Alpine Research at the University of Colorado, Boulder. Sophia Kalantzakos of New York University’s Geopolitics and Ecology of Himalayan Waters Initiative spoke to him about the flood catastrophe.



Sophia Kalantzakos: You’ve been warning about this kind of catastrophic flood for years. What exactly happened on the China-Nepal border on 26 August?

Alton C Byers: We’re getting more and more insights. What we can say for sure is that this is different from your classic glacial lake outburst flood. What we had was a massive breakage of ice and rock from high on Langtang Lirung on the Nepal side of the border with Tibet. It plummeted down and, in effect, was the catalyst for a series of cascading events. I think that the breakage was related to changes in permafrost, which has become vulnerable to warming trends. Permafrost was the cryosphere glue that held these mountains together for millennia, and we’re seeing more massive breakages of snow and ice and rock as well. I’ve seen rock faces the size of the Empire State Building calve off.

As it falls, friction at that velocity melts the ice. It hits the ground below. Hurricane-force winds level trees. All this then went into the Bhote Kosi, blocked the river and then you got this horrendous release of millions of cubic meters of water.

I’ve been monitoring such events since at least 2012, and the Seti Flood in the Pokhara region had almost the exact same sequence of events, and there have been a dozen others since then.

There was no warning, was it something that could have been predicted for this particular area?

Yeah, it happens very quickly, just a matter of hours or less from the initial breakage to the creation of what they call a hyper-concentrated slurry flood. Imagine liquid concrete flowing down the river, carrying boulders the size of houses. You can’t really predict these, but you can identify areas of risk from remote sensing, you can see mountains that have similar overhanging ice, and you can make the logical assumption that they would be more prone to breakage than others.

But really, the critical point, and that I’m starting to hear more and more on this in the Nepal press, is that there are settlements along floodplains. A tremendous surge in unregulated, unplanned urbanisation, with much of the building along the rivers where it really shouldn’t be. If you look at aerial photos from 50 years ago, you’ll see that the villages in the area were up high. Only farms may have been down by the river because that’s where a lot of fertile soil is. So this is unfortunately a consequence of building in the wrong places.

Why was there so much debris, rubble, and boulders coming down the mountain?

It’s rugged to begin with, it’s vertical, it’s an extremely dynamic environment. As mountains build, they also erode, and erosion takes the form of everything from soil loss to avalanches, to debris flows, to landslides, with a lot of stored material from past floods. So, when you get a new one, the new flood picks up this older material in addition to everything that it’s bringing down.

These are terrifying events. I’ve interviewed people who say they sound like

someone moaning in agony. It sloshes back and forth along the river, and can go up to 100 metres when it comes around the corner. And the smell is like gunpowder, probably because rocks are hitting each other and sparking. The footage from this flood is the most horrific I have ever seen. This was by far the largest.

How should the media frame this story? Is this related to climate change?

That is the number one question. And they want to know what kind of flood it was, they want to know how it happened. It’s a pretty complex process, and it’s something that we really haven’t been that aware of. Changes in the permafrost are relatively new to most scientists. I do have colleagues who have been studying it for 20 or 30 years like Wilfried Haberle of the University of Bern. He and I wrote a piece for the Nepali Times



Certainty on a Himalayan scale



After the Nepal flood last week, many news reports say the link between the disaster and the climate crisis is ‘unclear’, or still being figured out. Benjamin Horton of the School of Energy and the Environment of the City University of Hong Kong spoke to Johanna Son about how we do not need uncertainty reduced to zero before acting.

Johanna Son: Many are saying that the link between the Nepal catastrophe and climate change is ‘unclear’. What exactly does this mean?

Benjamin Horton: When scientists say the connection is “not yet clear”, they are usually referring to the precise attribution of this individual event, not to whether climate change is affecting the Himalaya.

Scientists are still reconstructing the exact sequence of events: how the glacier collapsed, whether thawing permafrost or meltwater contributed, how ice and rock entered the river, and whether a temporary blockage intensified the flood. Satellite observations indicate that an ice-and-rock avalanche descended from a glacierised slope, blocked the Lhende Khola and generated a sudden surge downstream.

But we should not confuse uncertainty about every link in that chain with uncertainty about the wider climate context. The Himalayan region is warming faster than the global average, glaciers are retreating, permafrost is degrading, and high-mountain slopes are becoming less stable. The rate of glacier melting in High Mountain Asia has also accelerated.

We do not require climate change to be the sole or immediate trigger before recognising its role. Smoking does not cause every individual case of lung cancer, but we know it increases the risk. Similarly, global warming is loading the dice toward increasingly unstable mountain conditions.

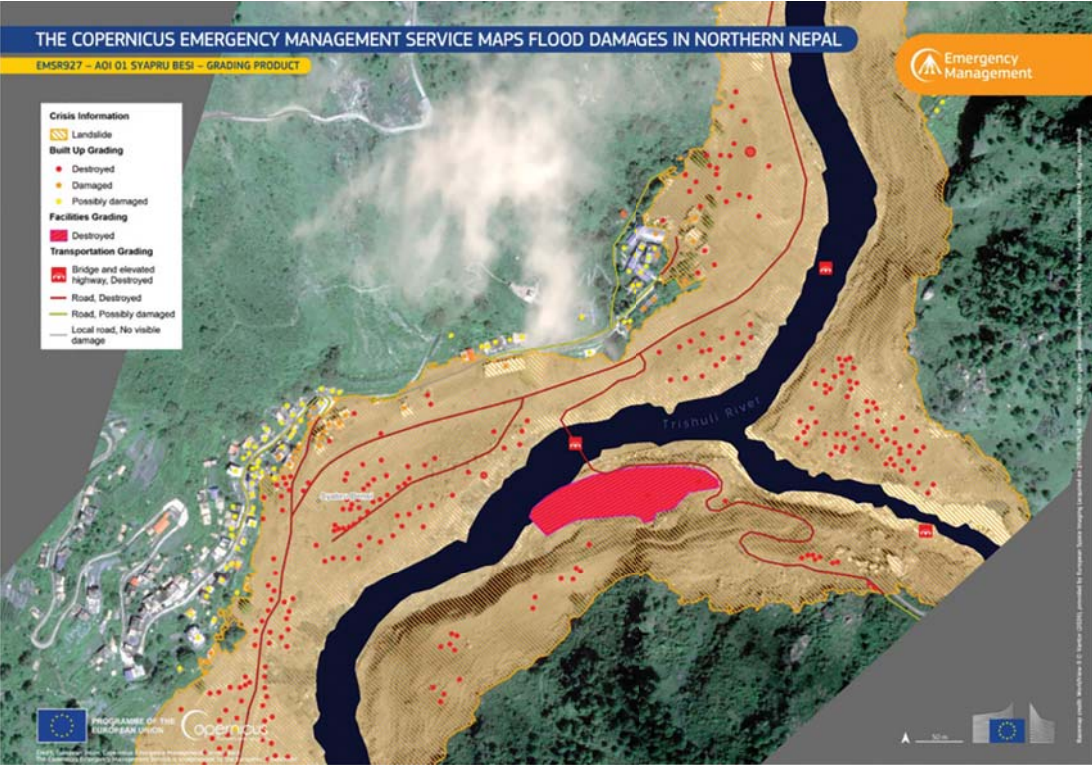
Can ‘we still don’t know for sure’ undercut the key message then?

Yes, if it is communicated badly. Scientific caution is essential, but caution about one event must not be misrepresented as uncertainty about the climate crisis itself.

Climate change rarely produces disasters through one simple, linear mechanism. It changes the background conditions within which hazards occur. Rising temperatures melt glaciers, thaw permafrost, weaken the frozen material holding rock and ice together, and contribute to the formation or expansion of glacial lakes. A collapse can then initiate an avalanche, block a river and release a catastrophic flood. This is a cascade of interacting hazards, not a single linear connection.

Climate change interacts with exposure and vulnerability. The hazard is being

e flood I have ever seen”



intensified by warming, while communities, roads, bridges, hydropower facilities and other infrastructure are exposed in narrow valleys. Weak warning systems, limited resources and cross-border information gaps can then turn a major hazard into a humanitarian catastrophe.

So, it doesn’t always need to be a linear connection?

Science should not be used to say, ‘perhaps it was something else, so we should wait’. The correct message is that we are still determining precisely how climate change influenced this particular collapse, but we already know that burning fossil fuels is warming and destabilising the environment in which it occurred.

Water is ice at 0°C and liquid at 1°C. Small changes in temperature can produce profound physical changes in a frozen landscape. We do not need uncertainty reduced to zero before acting. If anything, uncertainty about exactly where and when the next collapse will occur is an additional reason for urgency.

What ‘pre-existing conditions’ in Himalayan

glaciers increase the risk of a disaster like this?

The tragedy did not occur in a healthy and stable mountain system. It occurred in a cryosphere already under severe and increasing stress.

Himalayan glaciers are retreating, losing mass and exposing steep mountain slopes. Permafrost, which acts like a form of natural cement holding fractured rock together, is thawing. As glaciers shrink, they may also remove physical support from adjoining slopes, while meltwater can enter cracks and further weaken ice and rock. Steep topography then allows a relatively local failure to accelerate into a fast-moving avalanche or debris flow.

Nepal has lost close to one-third of its glacier ice in just over 30 years, while its glaciers melted 65% faster during the most recent decade assessed than during the preceding one.

At the same time, melting glaciers can create or enlarge lakes held back by loose and potentially unstable sediment. The valleys below contain settlements, roads, bridges and hydropower infrastructure. This combination of a deteriorating cryosphere, extremely

a year ago on what the paper called the ‘not-so-permanent permafrost’. In other words, it’s changing too. The main triggering events of this cascading process are almost identical to previous floods that I’ve studied. We will not know the causes for days or weeks or months, because it takes time. For now, we’re directing our energy to rescue. That’s where they should be.

When the rescue operations are over, then we’ll have time to do the satellite and helicopter reconnaissance to gain another level of insight. But to me the most important thing is then getting the scientists on the ground, where you start to really peel the layers of the onion back and figure out what happened, often because local people who know the area can show you things that the satellites and helicopters can’t pick up. There are yak herders up there, they can tell us what happened: that a third of that mountain broke off and fell down, causing the flood.

They know the terrain and what it looks like.

Exactly, they know the terrain. It’s a process, so we’re not really going to know for a long time. A number of my colleagues are being very cautious, and they’re saying that they can’t say definitively that it’s related to climate change, and I respect that fully. But I’m also...willing to take an additional step and say, based on my experience and previous floods, it is related to changes in permafrost, and that is directly related to warming trends that we’ve experienced.

What could Nepal have done better?

This also affected China, what could be a future joint plan since the Himalaya is interconnected and there are glacial lakes everywhere now?

I think you’ve hit the nail on the head. There are hundreds, thousands of glacial lakes in Tibet, some of them prone to catastrophic flooding, in which case, and this has happened before, the flood originates in Tibet, but the damage is done in Nepal. So, the need to increase communication between Nepal and China has been a discussion that’s been going on for years, and I think they’re making progress. Glacial lakes, you can see, you can install an early warning system, you can set up mechanisms. But you couldn’t have predicted this type of catastrophic event. We have to identify high-risk areas and start from there.

steep terrain, concentrated development and limited warning time creates the pre-existing conditions for catastrophe.

Can adaptation ever lead us out of the climate crisis?

No. Adaptation is essential, but we cannot adapt our way out of an accelerating climate crisis. Nepal urgently needs better glacier and permafrost monitoring, satellite observations, hazard maps, early-warning systems, evacuation planning, stronger infrastructure and rapid cross-border data sharing. These measures can save lives and reduce vulnerability. Wealthier, high-emitting countries also have a responsibility to provide finance and technology to countries that contributed relatively little to the problem but are experiencing severe consequences.

However, adaptation addresses the consequences. It does not remove the cause. If greenhouse gas emissions continue, temperatures will continue rising, glaciers and permafrost will continue deteriorating, and the hazards will become harder and eventually impossible to manage in some places.

There are physical and financial limits to adaptation. An early-warning system may help people escape a flood, but it cannot prevent a glacier from disappearing, rebuild an entire mountain system or make every exposed valley safe. We therefore need adaptation and mitigation simultaneously: protect people from the warming already unavoidable, while rapidly reducing the burning of coal, oil and gas to prevent far greater warming.

Soon, the media spotlight is going to turn to something else. There’s going to be some other catastrophe somewhere. How do we stay on message? How do we stay focused?

We have a very good start — Nepal has developed an excellent cadre of scientists, world-class glaciologists, as well as organisations like the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology, ICIMOD, and Kathmandu University. They’re on the leading edge of research, and the Chinese, too.

If you look at the peer-reviewed papers being produced about glaciers and glacier hazards, China is in the lead, as is Nepal. So we’ve got a foundation of support now that we didn’t have 15 years ago. The government is new, they’re being tested, they’re young, they’re out there now showing what they can do in terms of rescue and relief. I think after that, you’re going to see more attention turned to zoning and discouraging building in places prone to floods. The challenge is changing human awareness and human behaviour, and it can be done. Like we are doing with the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area Management Council on developing a glacier Hazard Management and Community Preparedness Plan.

The geopolitical climate is very contentious at the moment. It feels as if we’re distracted from fixing the climate problem.

I think that the Europeans, the Canadians, the Chinese, the Nepalis, and the rest of the world are moving ahead. We may have some challenges now in the US in terms of funding and the political agenda, for sure. USAID was a major donor for some of our earlier work in Nepal and Peru on glaciers. Everybody’s had their grants taken away, meanwhile, we continue this very, very important work.

A disaster like this in Nepal is going to happen again and again. I don’t want to end with a message of doom and gloom, because we are resilient. We can adapt. I think we just need to pay a little more attention to using good science, just like you alluded to a moment ago. We need good science, we need to share the results with local people, we need good practical preparedness plans, and smart building and construction—not building in areas that are guaranteed to flood.

It looks pretty bad right now. It was horrific what happened, but we have a way forward that can help mitigate all these adverse impacts.

This brings up the issue of climate justice ...

Nepal has contributed very little to the greenhouse gas emissions driving global warming, yet it is experiencing devastating consequences. The countries and industries most responsible for historic and continuing emissions must therefore do more than express sympathy. They must cut emissions rapidly and provide accessible finance, technology and scientific support to vulnerable countries for adaptation, disaster preparedness, recovery, and loss and damage.

What does the Nepal tragedy tell us about our future?

Nepal shows us that the climate crisis will increasingly arrive as a chain of interconnected events. Rising temperatures can destabilise glaciers and thaw permafrost, collapsing ice and rock can block rivers, those blockages can fail, and the resulting floods can devastate communities and critical infrastructure within minutes.

It also exposes the profound inequality of climate change. Nepal is a warning that yesterday’s understanding of risk is no longer sufficient for tomorrow’s climate. Infrastructure built for a relatively stable twentieth-century environment is being tested by rapidly changing twenty-first-century conditions.

But this future is not predetermined. Every fraction of a degree of warming avoided matters. Wealthier and high-emitting countries must rapidly reduce their use of coal, oil and gas while providing vulnerable nations with the finance, technology and scientific capacity needed to protect their people.

It will take time for children to heal from trauma but recovery will start with return to new homes and schools

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