

Nepal flash flood catastrophe

Scores dead, Indians missing

Kathmandu: Nearly 100 people were killed and over 750, including 133 Indian nationals, remain missing after a massive flash flood originating in Tibet swept through central Nepal on Wednesday, devastating several towns and villages, washing away critical bridges and crippling a dozen hydro-power projects.

At least 33 Calcuttans on a 13-day trip to Manasarovar were incommunicado till Wednesday night. Several of them had posted videos and spoken to officials of the travel agency on Tuesday night. (See Metro)

Nepal foreign minister Shisir Khanal told the parliament that an earthquake hit the Tibet region at 8.37am (local time) and the flash flood was reported three minutes later, suggesting the tremors may have caused a glacial outburst which triggered the floods.

The flood surged through

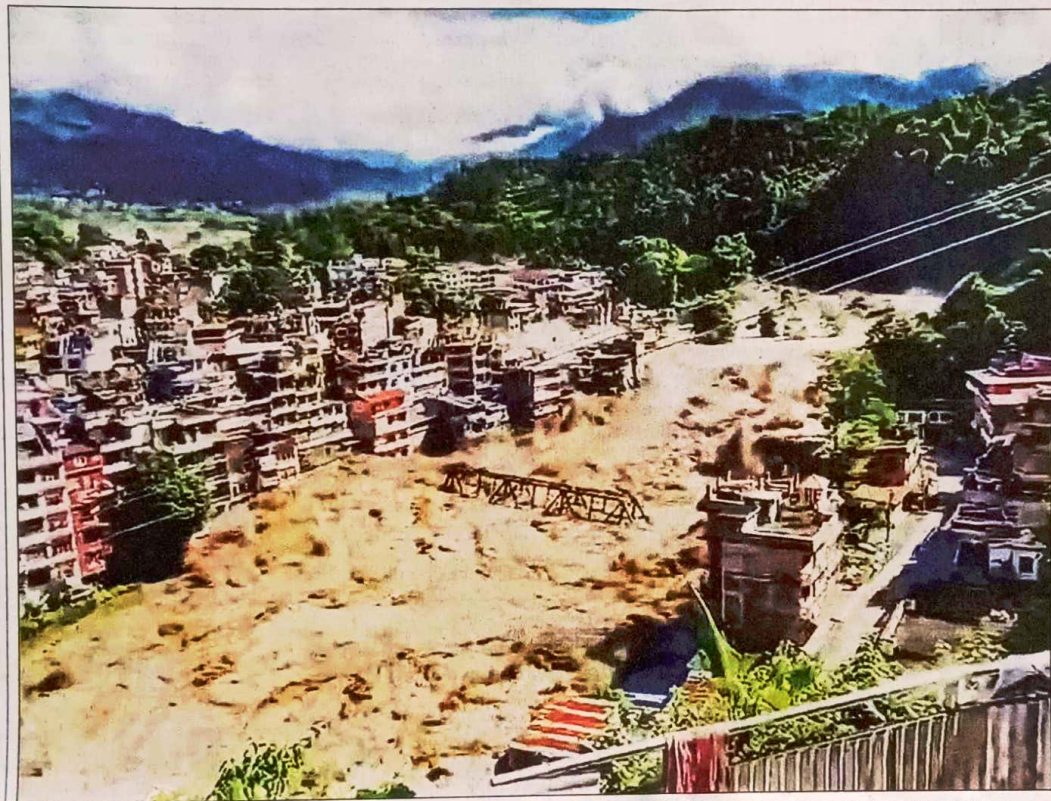
the Bhote Koshi river, affecting the Rasuwa and Dhading districts bordering Tibet, officials said.

The gushing waters entered the Trishuli river through the Bhote Koshi in Timure, a border town in Rasuwa district, because of the rockslide and swelling of the Lhunde river situated along the Nepal-Tibet border, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority said.

It then spread along the river course to other districts like Nuwakot, Chitawan, Gorkha, Tanahu and Nawalparasi East, covering areas ranging from around 70km to nearly 200km from capital Kathmandu.

The Nepal government said 95 bodies had been recovered and around 500 were missing, while China's state-run CGTN news channel said three people were dead and 265 were missing on the Chinese side of the border.

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Raging floodwaters sweep away a bridge in Rasuwa district of Nepal on Wednesday. (@NepalPoliceHQ/X via PTI)

133 Indians missing

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Videos from the affected areas showed a powerful surge of muddy water, rocks and debris sweeping through the border region, with people seen fleeing as the torrent moved towards buildings and vehicles.

In one clip, a four-storey structure could be seen being swept away by the raging waters, while another showed a car floating in fast-moving floodwaters in Rasuwa.

Other video clips showed bridges being pounded by powerful currents before collapsing and being swept away.

In Dhading district, a video showed floodwaters striking a bridge before the structure collapsed and was carried away.

Another video showed muddy water rapidly engulfing a bridge and sweeping it away in about 30 seconds.

Around 100 people have been rescued from different parts of the affected areas, officials said. Of them, 30 are undergoing treatment at Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital in Kathmandu.

The Nepal Tourism Board has issued helpline numbers, including the toll-free emergency 1234, the hotline 1144 and the Tourist Police's 9851289445.

At least 133 Indians and 37 NRIs are among the nearly 500 people missing, officials said. Over 50 of the Indians are Kailash Manasarovar Yatra pilgrims.

Other than the Indians and NRIs, the remaining missing tourists are from more than two dozen countries including the US, Malaysia, the UK, South Africa, Australia and the Netherlands.

Eighty security personnel, including 44 Nepal Army soldiers, are missing across various locations, foreign minister Khanal informed the House of Representatives.

The flash flood damaged eight operational hydropower projects with a total capacity of 354 MW and five under-construction projects located in Nuwakot and Rasuwa districts, according to a statement by the Independent Power Producers' Association Nepal (IPPAN).

The major operational hydropower projects damaged by the floods include Rasuwagadhi (111 MW), Sanjen Khola (78 MW) and Upper Trishuli 3A (60 MW).

According to the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology, Wednesday's flooding was not caused by rainfall in Rasuwa.

Nepal's Flood Forecasting Division said in a post on X in the afternoon: "According to information received from the Chinese side, since the lake at the river blockage site has not yet been fully drained, the risk remains in the Bhote Koshi and Trishuli areas."

"Even though the lake has not been fully drained at the site where the river is blocked, the risk persists in the Bhote Koshi and Trishuli areas, and people are urged to stay away from the river and remain in safe locations until the next update is issued," it added.

The Kathmandu Post said flooding in the Bhote Koshi had washed away the 42km road linking Betrawati in Nuwakot with the Rasuwagadhi border crossing in Rasuwa.

The government later said 19 motorable bridges had been swept away in the flash flood.

The Nepal Army, the Armed Police Force and the Nepal Police have been mobilised in the affected areas to carry out rescue and relief work after an emergency meeting chaired by Nepal Prime Minister Balendra Shah to assess the situation.

Chinese President Xi Jinping has ordered all-out efforts to search for and rescue missing people. PTI