

4 December 2009

Nepal's cabinet to meet on Everest

By Joanna Jolly

BBC News, Syangboche



Nepali ministers will fly into the meeting by helicopter

Nepalese ministers are preparing to hold a cabinet meeting on Mount Everest to raise awareness of the effects of climate change.

Ministers hope the world's highest cabinet meeting will attract the same attention as a similar event held underwater in the Maldives in October.

The meeting comes ahead of next week's climate summit in Copenhagen.

Scientific studies show temperatures are rising faster in the Himalayas than the rest of South Asia.

It has led to reduced snowfall and caused glaciers to melt.

Helicopters have been ferrying in medical equipment, oxygen canisters, soldiers and journalists to the small airstrip at Syangboche, high in the Himalayas.

It is from here that the expedition will set off to Kalipatar - a plateau at 5,200m (17,000ft) next to Everest's base camp.

Sherpa monks

The entire cabinet of 21 ministers - including the prime minister - plan to travel to Kalipatar by helicopter early on Friday.

They will be greeted by Sherpa monks before beginning their cabinet meeting.

But ministers will stay at Kalipatar for only 30 minutes before returning to Syangboche.

The trip is being funded by a group of Nepali private organisations, many of them from the tourist sector.

Suman Pandey, who is in charge of operations, says that safety is their primary concern.

"This is high altitude and people could get altitude sickness," he said.

"We have got medical backup supported by the Himalayan Rescue Association."

Mount Everest is the highest point on earth, with a summit 29,035 ft (8,850 m) above sea level.

29 November 2009

Mount Everest to host Nepal cabinet meeting



Mount Everest is the highest point on earth

Nepal is to hold a cabinet meeting on Mount Everest to highlight the threat global warming poses to glaciers.

On 4 December prime minister Madhav Kumar Nepal and those politicians physically fit enough will ascend 17,192ft (5,250m) to base camp.

In October the Maldives held a cabinet meeting underwater to warn of the effect of rising sea levels.

This meeting, to be held before the Copenhagen climate conference, aims to highlight Himalayan glacier melt.

With ice in the region melting at a rapid rate, lakes have been formed which could flood nearby villages.

Melted ice and snow also makes mountaineering routes more hazardous.

At such a high altitude health is a major concern, so a team of doctors will accompany the politicians.

They will fly to Everest's only airstrip, Lukla.

Doctors will make a final health assessment before a helicopter takes the cabinet to base camp, at the foot of Everest.

Once there they will hold a brief outdoor meeting.

Mount Everest is the highest point on earth, with a summit 29,035 ft (8,850 m) above sea level.

17 October 2009 10:13 UK

Maldives cabinet makes a splash



President Mohamed Nasheed and his cabinet met underwater to highlight the threat of global warming

The government of the Maldives has held a cabinet meeting underwater to highlight the threat of global warming to the low-lying Indian Ocean nation.

President Mohamed Nasheed and his cabinet signed a document calling for global cuts in carbon emissions.

Ministers spent half an hour on the sea bed, communicating with white boards and hand signals.

The president said the UN climate change conference in Copenhagen this December cannot be allowed to fail.

At a later press conference while still in the water, President Nasheed was asked what would happen if the summit fails. "We are going to die," he replied.

“ If the Maldives cannot be saved today we do not feel that there is much of a chance for the rest of the world ”

.....
President Mohamed Nasheed

The Maldives stand an average of 2.1 metres (7ft) above sea level, and the government says they face being wiped out if oceans rise.

"We're now actually trying to send our message, let the world know what is happening, and what will happen to the Maldives if climate change is not checked," President Nasheed said.

"If the Maldives cannot be saved today we do not feel that there is much of a chance for the rest of the world," he added.

Military minders

Three of the 14 cabinet ministers missed the underwater meeting, about 20 minutes by boat from the capital, Male, because two were not given medical permission and another was abroad, officials said.

President Nasheed and other cabinet members taking part had been practising their slow breathing to get into the right mental frame for the meeting, a government source said.



The cabinet were joined by instructors and military escorts

About 5m underwater, in a blue-green lagoon on a small island used for military training, they were observed by a clutch of snorkelling journalists.

Each minister was accompanied by a diving instructor and a military minder.

While underwater, they signed a document ahead of the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in December, calling on all nations to cut their carbon emissions.

World leaders at the summit aim to create a new agreement to replace the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which expires in 2012.

5 March 2006, 20:06 GMT

Himalayan melting risk surveyed

By Navin Singh Khadka
BBC News, Kathmandu



The station will quantify climate changes in the area

A new weather station is expected to show the extent of warming in the Himalayas, one of the world's biggest deposits of ice and a key source of fresh water.

It has been installed on the longest Himalayan glacier, in the Everest region of Nepal.

There have been numerous reports of glacial retreats in the Himalayas over the years, but this weather station will be able to quantify changes to the local climate.

One part of it has been set up on the Nguzumpa Glacier to record solar radiation, relative humidity, air and soil temperature, wind speed and direction, and precipitation.

The other part has been placed in the river fed by the 35km-long glacier, to measure changes in flow caused by glacial melt.

Officials with Nepal's Department of Hydrology and Metrology will climb up the Cho Oyu Mountain to the Nguzumpa Glacier in March to collect data from the unmanned station.

"Once we get to see the figures in March, we will learn the extent of glacial retreat caused by global warming," said the department's chief glaciologist, Om Ratna Bajracharya.

Temperatures rising

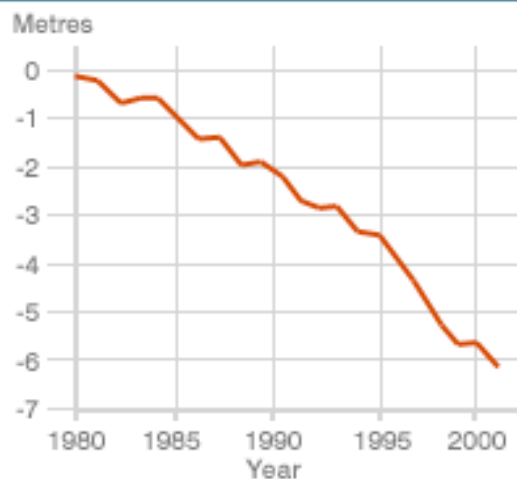
Previous studies have shown temperatures in the Himalayas have been rising at a rate of 0.06C per year, fuelling fears that melting glaciers have been filling glacial lakes more rapidly.

There are 3,250 glaciers in the Nepalese Himalayas, and 2,315 of them contain glacial lakes that are increasing in size at varying rates.

"While we do know that there is a lot of glacier melting due to global warming, we still need to know the exact causes and dynamics of such melting," said Chandra Prasad Gurung, Nepal representative of the environmental group WWF which provided the weather station equipment.

"Therefore, having the weather station installed will help us understand more of the weather patterns and enable us to monitor the issue clearly."

GLACIER MASS BALANCE - GLOBAL AVERAGE 1980-2001



Globally, glaciers have lost an average 6m in height in 20 years

Before the station, scientists either visited the glaciers themselves or studied satellite images to see any changes.

Most of the scientific reports have shown that glacial retreat and increases in lake size are occurring at a rapid rate.

Between 1970 and 1989, Japanese researchers discovered most glaciers in the Everest region had retreated 30-60m (100-200ft). To the west, in the Dhaulagiri region, field studies carried out before 1994 showed the same trend.

Nepal's most studied glacier in Tsonong Himal underwent a 10m (33ft) retreat between 1978 and 1989.

However, the Himalayan glacial system is not the only one under threat.

The World Glacier Monitoring Service, supported by the United Nations Environment Programme (Unep), collated records from across the globe and concluded that 30 major glaciers - assessed as being a representative global sample - had thinned by an average of 6m (20ft) between 1980 and 2001.

Flooding lakes

Two years ago Unep and the Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development found that 20 glacial lakes in Nepal and 24 in Bhutan were filling up so rapidly that their walls could breach by 2009.

The report was based on satellite images, but there have been no follow-up studies even though glaciologists have called for urgent further investigation.

Their worries are triggered by both the short- and long-term problems that retreating glaciers can pose.

A short-term problem is Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (Glof), the result of shrinking glaciers and melting ice that causes lakes to grow and breach loose moraine walls, sending huge floods of water, mud and boulders downstream.

In 1985 a glacial lake burst in Khumbu in the Everest region, killing at least 20 people and washing

away a hydropower station, the trekking trail to Everest base camp and numerous bridges.



Part of the new station will record river flow

Researchers say the worst-case scenario would be a major Himalayan earthquake, which could cause dozens of glacial lakes to burst simultaneously.

In Peru, experts say about 30,000 people have died in Glof-related incidents.

In the long-term, computer simulations suggest that global warming will affect the flow of Himalayan rivers over the 21st Century.

They indicate spring flow in these rivers will increase over the next five decades, but the time will come when there will be so little snow in the Himalayas that the rivers could run dry in the dry season.

"In some rivers, the flow may go down by as much as 90%," said hydrologist Syed Iqbal Hosnain, of the University of Calicut, India, who modelled what would happen in snow-fed regional rivers.

But the depletion in water level in Himalayan rivers will not just affect the lives of people in the mountains, but also the hundreds of millions of people who live downstream.

Nearly 70% of discharge to the River Ganges comes from Nepalese snow-fed rivers, which means that if Himalayan glaciers dry up, so could the Ganges.

This could also apply to other major rivers in South Asia like the Brahmaputra and Indus, the lifelines for millions.

Images courtesy of WWF Nepal/Aarati Gurung