

Japan backs Bhutan GLOF project

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WITH global warming on the rise and glacial lakes filling up fast in the Lunana area, Bhutan seems ill prepared for the dangers of glacial lakes outburst floods, what with an acute lack of funds and technology, or even know-how.

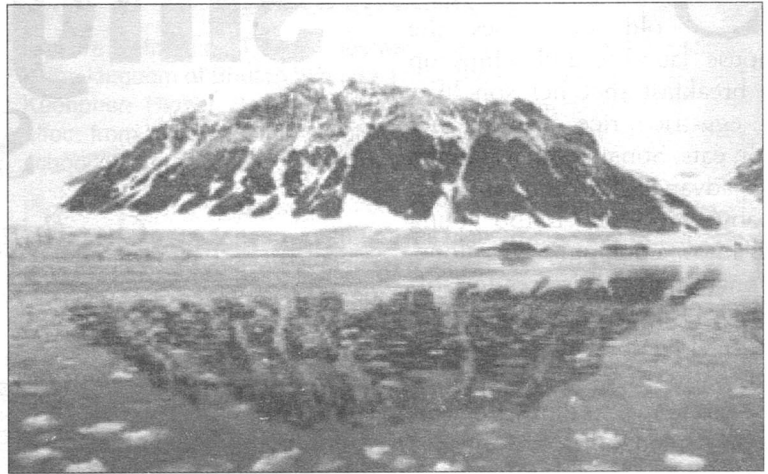
All that could change with the recent agreement between Japan and Bhutan to start a project that would study the glacial lakes and fortify disaster management efforts in case of a glacial flood.

The project, worth around US\$ 2 million and funded by Japan, will see Japanese experts in science and technology studying Bhutanese glaciers and training local glaciologists as well.

The project will fund much needed equipment, such as a satellite system to identify potentially high-risk lakes, instruments to study the biological

and physical features of the lakes, and a GIS mapping tool for hazard identification downstream. It will also finance technical training for Bhutanese in the geology and mines department. New devices are expected to make work on the glacial lakes less tedious.

The Japan international



cooperation agency (JICA) and the department of geology and mines (DCM) will start work in May this year. The project will focus on the risk of glacial floods along the Mangdechu basin (Trongsa).

Geology and mines department director, Dorji Wangda, said that the joint project would improve Bhutanese glaciologists, who in near future would be able to conduct research and investigation on GLOF independently.

Dorji Wangda said that, with the help of Japanese experts and equipment, it would also be possible to revisit inventories and find better standards to classify dangerous lakes. "We can supervise the time series of the glaciers and

record the melting rate, creating a data bank on high risk glaciers," he said.

JICA's Mimura Satoru said that, though Japan does not have glaciers, it is nonetheless keen on knowing the risks of glacial lake outbursts and supporting the activities of climate change.

He added that the three-year-long project would focus on manpower development of the geology and mines department and provide the knowledge about glacial floods to people residing in vulnerable regions below the lakes.

"The project will be a symbol of friendship between Bhutan and Japan," said Mimura Satoru.