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Japanese help to study glacial lakes

1 May, 2009 - There could not be a more appropriate time, for the government to receive help to investigate and research glacial lake outburst floods (GLOF) in Bhutan, and plan effective disaster management, than yesterday.

With the Punakha incident still fresh in the mind, the Japan international cooperation agency (JICA) and the Gross National Happiness Commission (GNHC) signed a project to study GLOF phenomena in Bhutan yesterday.

"It is a good and opportune time to start the project, taking into consideration what happened on Wednesday," said JICA resident representative, Tetsuo Yabe.

Under the project, JICA will provide experts and receive Bhutanese personnel connected with the project for technical training in Japan. About 40 short-term experts will be dispatched by JICA several times a year during the project period. At the same time, a glacial lake research expert and coordinator will be dispatched as long-term experts.

"It isn't easy to stop GLOFs, but it's possible to find measures to avoid such disasters," said Tetsuo Yabe.

The officiating director general of the department of geology and mines (DGM), Yeshi Dorji, said, "There are many inaccessible areas and JICA will also support the project by providing necessary equipment for its implementation."

The project aims to build a network system sharing satellite data for research, complete an inventory of historical glacial lake expansions, conduct a detailed analysis on the hazardous lakes, assess risk factors and triggers of GLOF in and around glacial lakes, and recommend effective countermeasures against GLOFs, such as early warning systems.

"JICA wouldn't only help Bhutan to deal with GLOF situations, but also develop a better understanding of the situation," said GNHC secretary, Karma Tshiteem.

The project will also help identify potentially high-risk glacial lakes, clarify the history and process of glacial lakes expansions through compilation of an inventory, develop

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By Kunzang Choki

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