



A resident struggles to cross the swollen Dhaula River following heavy rains that flooded Gelephu yesterday

Heavy rains flood Gelephu

Nirmala Pokhrel | Tsirang

Heavy rains that flooded Gelephu until late afternoon yesterday did not cause damage to life and property, Gelephu thromde officials said.

The rainwater that flooded the border gate area soon dried up and there was no requirement for evacuation, according to officials.

To avoid more flooding in the low laying areas, thromde officials were deployed full time near the border gate's storm water drainage to clear debris that kept clogging the drains.

About six kilometers away, the Dhaula River swelled stranding many travellers for over five hours yesterday morning.

Further up around eight kilometer away at the aie-slip, a major landslide blocked traffic flow until late afternoon.

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Villages grapple with water disputes and shortages

Tenzin Namgyel

Last year, a group of villagers from Toeb Renakha in Punakha destroyed newly built water tanks and pipes for three chiwogs of Talo gewog, disrupting water to about 80 households.

Talo gewog administration accused the group for breaking around four tanks built near Tangolum stream and cutting high-density polythene pipes into pieces.

The case is with the Punakha dzongkhag court.

Talo gup Dorji Wangchuk said that unless the case is resolved, three chiwogs would continue to face acute drinking water shortage.

The water sources of Gungthramo, Labtsakha and Sewo Drangsa chiwogs have dried and residents drain rainwater for consumption.

In winter when there is not enough rain, some villagers borrow water from their neighbours who depend on brooks

that run nearby their homes.

Springs, streams and ponds that once served as sources of drinking water for these chiwogs have dried. Locals claim that the sources disappeared because of global warming.

According to the Talo gewog administration, around Nu 1.7 million was spent on infrastructure development for water. There were eight water tanks that had been planned for the 80 households.

The villagers of Renakha had reservations sharing the Tangolum stream as it is used as irrigation water. Some expressed concerns of poor harvest if they shared the water.

A source said that the infrastructure was built without obtaining environmental clearance from the dzongkhag administration. "I think the infrastructures were built on mutual understanding," said a dzongkhag official. "If they obtained the clearance there would not have been any issue." Pg.2

Briefly

Missing athlete news is fake

»The Bhutan Olympic Committee confirmed that the news about a Bhutanese athlete gone missing from the Olympic village in London is untrue. The news article had gone viral on social media.

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Announcement

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Haa court convicts BOD manager and attendant

Yeshey Dema

Haa dzongkhag court has sentenced a fuel depot manager of Bhutan Oil Distributor (BOD) to one year three months imprisonment for official misconduct.

The court also sentenced the fuel attendant to three years and one month in prison for criminal misappropriation of property.

The manager and the attendant were also ordered to refund more than Nu 2.64 million (M) to the Tashi Group of Companies.

The fund misuse happened in March 2016 when the depot manager, Kencho Dema, from Paro delegated the administrative responsibilities to the fuel attendant, Langa Tshering from Trashigang when she was on leave.

According to the judgment, Kencho Dema did not

seek administrative approval from the parent organisation, Tashi Group, to allow him to take over the administrative responsibilities and that resulted in the misuse of funds from the sale of fuel.

The judgment stated that Kencho Dema failed her duty to manage, often delegating her duty to her subordinate Langa Tsering, who don't possess any qualification nor any experience to manage the staff. "She is liable to refund one-third of the total fund shortage."

Kencho Dema is liable to refund Nu 882,619.

The court also ordered Langa Tshering to refund about Nu 1.7M.

Haa police initially charged Kencho Dema for criminal misappropriation of property and Langa Tshering for aiding and abetting the crime.

But Haa court, after finding out that the case is a criminal offence by nature, pointed out the jurisdiction limitation of police to prosecute the case in accordance to section 71 of the Police Act.

Police then forwarded the case to the Office of Attorney General (OAG) and OAG changed the charges.

The court stated that they accepted the charges framed by OAG, respecting the procedural fairness guaranteed by the procedural law. "OAG is the chief prosecuting agency of a state, which has ascendancy over any other prosecuting agency on the subject of prosecution."

Meanwhile, the two defendants have 10 working days to appeal on the judgment that was issued on August 4.

Heavy rain forecast in southern Bhutan

Phurpa Lhamo

The National Centre for Hydrology and Meteorology (NCHM) has cautioned the people of south and southeastern region of possible heavy rainfall in the next 72 hours.

NCHM issued a public notification on August 7.

The deputy chief with weather and climate service division of NCHM, Tayba B Tamang, said the region is experiencing light rainfall currently but it is expected to increase over the days.

He said the country is experiencing an active southwest monsoon and that there might be cases of flash flood and landslides because of the rain. "During such period, people who are travelling need to be cautious."

The officiating director of Department of Disaster Management (DDM), Pema Singye, said that the department will issue a public advisory through Bhutan Broadcasting Service Corporation (BBSC) soon.

He said that DDM usually issues a monsoon advisory containing safety messages for the public at the onset of monsoon. "But we will issue this time too depending on the severity of the weather forecast received from the NCHM."

The officiating director, however, said that there were no reports of flash floods due to heavy rainfall in the southern region until today.

He said that if anything occurs, the dzongkhag and thromde administrations would immediately respond to the situation and convene dzongkhag and thromde DDM to operationalise response and relief.

NCHM's engineer and in-charge with flood monitoring and command room, Sangay Tenzin, said that NCHM is monitoring the weather.

Tayba B Tamang said there has been heavy rainfall at the end of June this year that caused many landslides and flashfloods in the country.

Villages grapple with water disputes and shortages

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The people of three chiwogs contributed labour for 21 days to build the infrastructure.

Disputes over water are reported across the country. In Phangyul gewog, Wangduephodrang, more than 1,000 acres of paddy fields remain fallow each year.

The villages here irrigate their fields with rainwater, as the neighbouring Kazhi gewog does not allow irrigation channel to pass through their fields.

Of the seven villages in the gewog, Goengkhar, Khomche and Phangyul villages are severely hit.

The government has planned to source water from Baychu stream, which is about 25km from Phangyul for irrigation. If the plan comes through, it would benefit more than 305 households.

Despite holding several consultations together with the Wangdue dzongkhag administration, the people of Kazhi gewog have for years refused to give clearance to route the water through their fields.

However, last December after Kazhi gewog consented, the villagers of Phangyul did a survey to build a channel where each household contributed labour for months.

Kazhi gewog accepted the proposal, with the condition that about 50 percent of the water from that irrigation channel should be allocated to them.

However, when the survey reached Komathang village, the people did not stick to the decision and the survey had to discontinue, Phangyul Mangmi Wangchuk Namgay, said. "The decision to bring water for our village is in the hands of the government," he said.

During the 10th Plan, Nu 84M was also allocated for the irrigation project, but was withdrawn because of communal dispute.

The problem of implementing the Water Act

The Water Act gives priority to drinking water over irrigation. It also says that if one village has enough water, it has to share with other villages that do not have drinking water.

The water regulation also states that water being property of the state, any user right developed in the individual, household or community will not tantamount to ownership right over a water body at any point of time.

Agriculture minister Yeshey Dorji who is the vice-chairman of the National Environment Commission said that it's not easy to implement the Act when people have strong beliefs of traditional right on water usage. "Despite having an Act, we need to do public consultations and make them aware of the provisions," he said. "Only then will they understand the law."

The water regulation also states that water users from an irrigation facility will share its water either through mutual understanding or on the basis of existing practices when such practices are equitable and fair.

It further states that if traditional practices are deemed to be unfair and inequitable to some of its users, the water will be shared based on the size of landholdings.

Alternatives

The agriculture minister said that the water shortage in three chiwogs in Talo would be addressed when the Phendey irrigation channel is renovated. Water from irrigation channel could be used for drinking.

The channel piped from Toebi rongchu (stream) will benefit 300 households of Renakha, Toebisa, Wolokha and Changyul. The renovation work according to the minister will be completed in eight months. The 25-km long

channel will be rebuilt with Nu 34M.

For communal water dispute of Phangyul and Kazhi gewogs, Lyonpo Yeshey Dorji said that he has instructed the Wangdue dzongkhag administration to conduct a survey once again.

"If the channel is built, the running cost would still be high," he said. "We could look at alternatives of shifting to crops that require less water so that farmers do not have to depend on paddy."

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From Pg.1

Stranded vehicles were allowed to pass by 3pm, Department of Road's engineer Kishor Chhetri said.

The situation was worse at Box cutting. Muck kept eroding making it difficult for the DoR to clear the road while it was still raining.

"This is the heaviest road-

block so far this year. We're fulltime here during the day with machinery to clear the road as soon as the rain stops," he said. "People should avoid traveling after dark."

Several minor roadblocks were reported along the Gelephu-Zhemgang highway.