

Pakistani police officials inspect the site of suicide bomb attack in Mingora, the capital of troubled Swat valley yesterday. The suicide attack in Swat valley left 14 policemen dead, officials said, a month after the army said the area had been cleared of militants.

Suicide attack in Swat kills 14 policemen

AFP, Peshawar

A suicide attack in the main town in Pakistan's northwestern Swat valley yesterday left 14 policemen dead, officials said, a month after the army claimed the area had been cleared of Taliban.

"The policemen were being given training in Mingora town when a suicide bomber entered the ground and blew himself up near the recruits, killing 14 of them," Swat police chief Qazi Ghulam Farooq told AFP.

A senior administration official, Ateef-ur-Rehman, confirmed the attack and said there were a number of casualties, adding police had been put on high alert against more attacks.

Another local senior police official, Mohammad Idrees, said that a curfew had been imposed in Mingora, adding troops and police were patrolling the town and people quickly shut their businesses in fear of more bombings.

It was the first major attack in Mingora since the military claimed last month to

have cleared the valley of Taliban militants, paving the way for residents who had fled the area to avoid the fighting to begin returning home.

Pakistan in April launched a punishing military offensive against the Taliban in the northwest, targeting the rebels in the districts of Swat, Buner and Lower Dir after the militants advanced closer to the capital Islamabad.

The push forced 1.9 million civilians from their homes, most seeking refuge with relatives and the rest packing into refugee camps, creating a humanitarian crisis for impoverished Pakistan.

Last month, Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani announced that the military had "eliminated" extremists in the northwest and according to government and UN statistics, 1.6 million displaced people have returned home.

Gilani's government has announced steps to reconstruct property destroyed during the punishing military operation and action to alleviate poverty in the area under a comprehensive package.

Swat slipped out of government control after radical cleric Maulana Fazlullah mounted a violent campaign in which his followers beheaded opponents, burnt schools and fought against government troops to enforce Sharia law.

Pakistan says more than 1,930 militants and over 170 security personnel have been killed in the offensive, but the death tolls are impossible to verify independently.

The military has now turned its attention to the lawless nearby tribal belt, the heartland of Pakistan's umbrella organisation Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which is allegedly linked to al-Qaeda.

But skirmishes continue in Swat and Buner, raising fears that the Taliban are regrouping in the mountains, a tactic militants have adopted after government offensives in the past.

Pakistani authorities have also advocated the establishment of local militia in the northwest to try and keep the Taliban at bay, amid reports that the Islamist fighters have simply melted into the mountains.

Fazlullah meanwhile remains at large.

Advani has to go, Rajnath to follow, RSS tells BJP

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has decided to bring in sweeping changes in the leadership of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) that would see veteran leader LK Advani and party president Rajnath Singh step down from their posts, RSS sources said Saturday.

The expected upheaval is meant to bring an immediate end to the ugly internecine fighting in the BJP and to ensure it does not deviate from its known ideology 'for the sake of power', the sources told IANS.

"Those facing exit from their present positions in the coming days will include Advani, Rajnath Singh and many of the existing party functionaries at the national level," a reliable source said, soon after RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat met Advani at the RSS headquarters here Saturday afternoon.

"Advani will have to go (as leader of the opposition). Who will replace him is not yet decided. The message has been conveyed in no uncertain terms. Now it is for Advani and other leaders to decide the modalities of his exit," said the RSS source on the condition of anonymity because he is not authorised to speak to the media.

The sources also confirmed that the organisation was not happy with the way Rajnath Singh has handled the infighting in the main opposition party, inviting public ridicule.

So, after Advani, next on the block would be Rajnath Singh.

"We haven't yet decided who all will be at the helm of the affairs. But change is imminent. We have indicated to the party brass, the sooner they do it, the better it is," said the RSS functionary.

"The roadmap for BJP's growth is to be chalked out by the party but a new leadership will do it. We will not interfere in the day-to-day affairs of the BJP," said another RSS leader closely associated with the recent developments.

He added, "The RSS had told the BJP even before all these controversies erupted that they should strengthen the organisation and focus more at the grassroots level. If they need any support, we would help them."

The BJP was already in crisis after suffering a stinging defeat in the April-May Lok Sabha elections.

Hundreds of Myanmar rebels flee to China Says rights group

AFP, Lincang

Hundreds of ethnic rebels have fled Myanmar into China where they surrendered their weapons after retreating from clashes with junta forces, a rights group said yesterday.

Rebels from Kokang, a mainly ethnic Chinese region of Myanmar's Shan state, retreated after deciding they were no match for junta troops, the Washington-based US Campaign for Burma said in a statement.

The group said as many as 700 may have crossed into China and surrendered their weapons but the numbers could not be independently confirmed.

Although junta troops have control of the Kokang region, the campaign warned that the situation remained tense and fighting could resume at any time.

Several Chinese security officials said they could not confirm that retreating rebels had crossed the border when contacted by AFP.

VGF cards

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were including 40 per cent names recommended by ruling party men.

He said 720 names out of 2,000 were recommended by the local AL men in Bilchalan union.

Handial UP Chairman Nurul Islam rather defended such political quota saying that these 40 per cent beneficiaries who are being selected by the party men are also poor.

As the AL men yet could not finalise names of beneficiaries for their unofficial quota, Chatmohar Municipality is yet to complete its list of 2,000 VGF beneficiaries although the government-fixed deadline for preparing the list expired on August 25.

"We've already finalised 60 per cent names for the list but the rest 40 per cent names will be submitted by the ruling party men. But they are yet to submit the names to us," Chatmohar Municipality Mayor Abdul Mannan told The Daily Star.

"AL leaders are not involved in preparing the VGF list. Out of jealousy, some people are making such allegations. But it is true that as the head of upazila VGF committee I have

recruited some honourable persons in every ward to ensure transparency in VGF card distribution," said Md Shamsuddin Khabir, chairman of Chatmohar Upazila.

When asked, Chatmohar Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) ASM Rafiqunnabi said he knew nothing about the irregularities in the listing of VGF beneficiaries. "We've not got such complaint. If we get any official complaint about inclusion of names in VGF lists on political consideration, then we will take action," the UNO added.

Meanwhile, police on Tuesday released a local UP member who was arrested on charge of embezzlement of VGF foodgrains. He was released within hours after his arrest last week upon an undertaking of an AL leader.

Sayed Shahid Alam, Officer-in-Charge of Chatmohar police station, said, "We arrested UP member Golam Mostafa on charge of embezzlement of rice allocated for VGF programme. He was released from the police station upon an undertaking by the joint secretary of Chatmohar upazila unit AL Bazlul Karim."

Moudud asked

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to go to England and Germany for medical treatment and a fellowship.

The chamber judge passed the order after a hearing on a government petition, moved by Attorney General Mahbubey Alam for staying the HC order.

During the hearing, the attorney general told the court that the government is apprehending that Moudud Ahmed after going abroad could make such statement that could go against the government initiatives for bringing the 1971 war criminals into trial.

He prayed to the court to direct Moudud not to take part in any political activity abroad except the treatment and fellowship.

Opposing the attorney general's submission, Moudud Ahmed told the court that he never made any statement at home or abroad against the trial of war criminals.

Mahbubey Alam told The Daily Star that the government would not bar Moudud from going abroad for the purposes of medical treatment and doing a fellowship.

Upon a writ petition, filed by the BNP leader, the HC on August 2 directed the government not to restrict him from going abroad.

LAW MINISTER RULES OUT SC CHIEF'S COMMENT
Law Minister Shafique Ahmed yesterday outright rejected the comment made by BNP leader Salauddin Quader Chowdhury that the present government has no authority to try the war criminals.

Salauddin at a BBC Bangladesh Sanglap on Saturday

said, "This government may have the power to hold the trial of war criminals but it doesn't have the authority to do so."

While asked for reaction on this comment, the law minister told reporters at his secretariat office that this government has every right, authority and efficiency to try all kinds of offences, including the crimes against humanity committed during the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971.

He said the government would hold the trial of war criminals in a transparent and fair manner maintaining international standard.

"We believe in the rule of law. We have amended the International Crimes (Tribunal) Act, 1973 for trying the criminals and we must bring the culprits under the act," the minister said.

He said the government has started the process for setting up tribunals and other office rooms for the judges, lawyers, investigators and foreign observers in this regard.

The tribunal and relevant offices will be set up on Abdul Gani Road in the city, he said.

He said his ministry has already sent a letter to the ministry of housing and public works to shift the offices of administrative tribunal, administrative appellate tribunal and the directorate of registration for setting up the tribunal for trying the criminals.

The minister also said, "There is no pressure from any foreign countries on us regarding trial of war criminals. Rather some countries have requested us to hold it in an internationally acceptable manner."

Ctg port graft

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Anti-Corruption Commission to conduct further investigation and take necessary actions against the former adviser, member of the parliamentary body on shipping ministry Shajahan Khan told reporters after a committee meeting at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

The committee also asked the authorities concerned to take all necessary measures including increase the number of public transports to reduce sufferings of homebound passengers during Eid vacation.

Shajahan, also the shipping minister, said his ministry would implement the recommendations of the parliamentary probe body investigating the corruption allegation against the former adviser.

Noor-e-Alam Chowdhury, chairman of the standing committee, told reporters, "We have asked the ministries concerned to ensure that the city dwellers

can go home safely during the Eid vacation."

The committee asked the authorities concerned to increase the number of ferries and river craft and ensure that they don't carry passengers beyond their capacity, said Alam Chowdhury, also an Awami League lawmaker.

"Two ferries will soon be pressed into service at the Paturia ferry ghat on the occasion of Eid, which will help ease traffic jam there," he added.

The committee asked the shipping ministry to open registration of trawlers to bring those under supervision.

"A huge number of trawlers are plying the rivers and canals across the country without any authorisation. Since their operation cannot be banned for their contribution to the village economy, the committee asked the authorities concerned to register them," Alam Chowdhury said.

Now it's hard to identify the

owner of a trawler if it faces an accident but it will be easier to detect them once all trawlers are brought under the registration process, he added.

Qaeda names Saudi prince's bomber

AFP, Dubai

al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula has identified the suicide bomber who tried to assassinate Saudi Arabia's deputy interior minister, a US monitoring group reported yesterday.

SITE Intelligence Group cited a statement posted on Jihadist Internet forums as saying Abdullah Hassan Taleh al-Asiri, who blew himself up on Thursday near Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, was on a list of 85 men wanted by the Saudi authorities.

Swine flu menacingly poised

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Tourists are being warned about travel.

Developed countries are rushing in vaccines even before those are licensed or approved. Although those vaccines are unlikely to be distributed until next year, stockpiling is a worthwhile investment because a second wave of pandemic is expected. There are some debates about the magnitude of the second wave. Some say it could be as dangerous as the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic which wiped out 50 million people. Others say the mutated second wave might not be as virulent, and rather be milder. But no one dares to be complacent. Not after they went wrong on where to watch for the next pandemic -- they had thought it would start somewhere in Asia, but it started in Mexico.

Countries are stocking up Tamiflu antiviral drug to treat swine flu patients, and pictures of panicked parents buying huge quantities of the drug are emerging. Debates are also raging about how safe Tamiflu is for children, who should take it

and who should not.

For Bangladesh the situation is a bit precarious. Safety measures in hospitals are always questionable here, and we have little experience in handling an epidemic of such a scale. Reports are there that patients are not being properly handled in public hospitals, and some private hospitals are turning them away.

When richer countries are making their grab for vaccines, there is a little chance for a poor country to get hold of the coveted commodity now. Still the effort has to be there, and the antiviral Tamiflu has to be stocked up. Most developed countries have large stocks of Tamiflu. The UK, for example, has enough antivirals to treat 35 million people -- over a half of the country's total population. UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown announced that the stockpile will be increased to treat 50 million people.

The Bangladesh government now has a stock of 32 lakh doses of Tamiflu called Oseltamivir. While one early warning was that one-third of the world's population would be wiped out by the flu --

the latest US estimate says 90,000 of its population will die, and UK fears 67,000 deaths in the country.

In light of the situation, 29 lakh Tamiflu doses in Bangladesh most likely will not last long. With an average treatment of 10 doses for each infected person, 29 lakh doses are likely to treat only 2,90,000 patients, in the country with a dense population of over 15 crore. The programme for raising public awareness must shift to a higher gear, which is still confined to some irregular newspaper advertisements.

The next flu season will also be a time of heightened danger, when the season will change and almost everybody will sneeze and get a runny nose. The time will be perfect for the virus to attack ferociously.

Fighting swine flu is costly and needs a careful budgetary allocation. Bangladesh must realign its health budget, and find some emergency funds to develop its capacity to treat the poor who will not be able to afford private care.

This is a new challenge that we all must face together.

Govt escaped legal disaster

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two days in the face of strong criticism and to avoid legal complexities.

"Consultation with the Supreme Court is mandatory. Therefore, any posting and promotion of, and disciplinary action against judicial officers including the district judges and magistrates exercising judicial functions without consultation with the Supreme Court will be void," the Appellate Division said in the verdict in Bangladesh versus Idrisur Rahman case in 1999.

The apex court made the same observation in the Aftabuddin versus Bangladesh case.

In its landmark verdict on separation of the judiciary from the executive, the SC laid down more clearly and definitely the significance of article 116 of the constitution to assert independence of the judiciary.

Article 116 says the president in consultation with the Supreme Court shall determine the posting, promotion and grant of leave and discipline of persons employed in the judicial service and magistrates discharging judicial responsibilities.

"In exercising control and discipline of persons...the views and opinion of the Supreme Court shall have primacy over those of the executive," says one of the 12 SC directives in the verdict of the separation of judiciary case delivered in 2000.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, eminent jurist

Shahdeen Malik said if the government decision were challenged, the SC would most likely have ordered that sending them into retirement was illegal because of violation of article 116 of the constitution and the apex court's directives in the judiciary separation case.

Home Minister Sahara Khatun and State Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Quamrul Islam talked to judges Gafur and Shahjahan and brought them to the Prime Minister's Office, sources close to the negotiation process told The Daily Star.

On the prime minister's assurance to reinstate them in the service, the two judges refrained from filing the writ petitions.

At its meeting last Thursday the parliamentary standing committee on law, justice and parliamentary affairs thanked Sahara and Quamrul for their role in stifling a conflict between the executive and the judiciary centring the issue. It also thanked the prime minister for her wise decision to reinstate the two judges.

The committee also decided to probe the role of HT Imam, prime minister's adviser on establishment and administrative affairs, and two secretaries in sending the two district judges into retirement and decided to ask them to appear before it to explain whether their action was constitutional or not.

The committee found out that Imam had initiated the

move to send the judges into retirement and got support from the secretaries.

Law Minister Shafique Ahmed was not even consulted about the move although it was his ministry that had forwarded the prime minister's advice to the president for issuing the retirement order.

At a press conference on Friday, Imam claimed that he initiated the move on the prime minister's directive and that the prime minister reinstated the two judges as they apologised to her.

Sources close to the judges, however, said they did not seek apology to the prime minister to get back their jobs -- they were rather preparing to challenge the government order.

When contacted over telephone yesterday, Judge Abdul Gafur declined to make any comment on the matter. He only said he is aware of Imam's comments and will say anything, if necessary, on consultation with the judicial service association.

State Minister Quamrul had claimed on Saturday that the parliamentary committee did not decide to ask HT Imam to appear before it. But he was the most vocal against sending the two judges on retirement.

Parliament Secretariat officials, who attended the committee meeting, said the state minister termed sending the judges into retirement "unethical". They said the meeting's minutes preserved also on audiocassettes contain the truth.

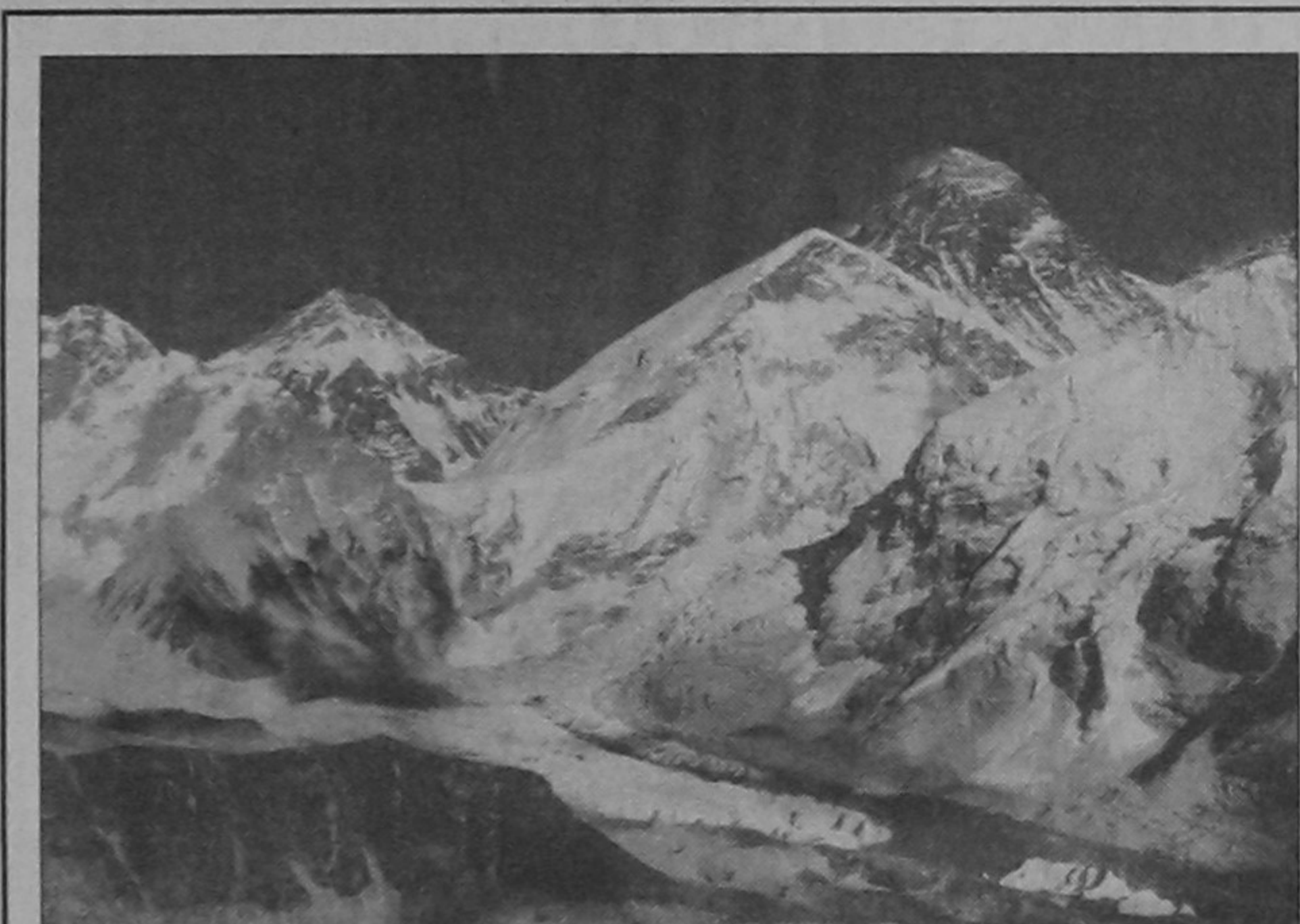


PHOTO: AFP

In this undated picture the world's tallest mountain Mt Everest at 8848 meters stand in front of Khumbu Glacier, one of the longest glaciers in the world. Nepal has more than 2,300 glacial lakes and experts say at least 20 are in danger of bursting.

Melting glaciers threaten 'Nepalese tsunami'

AFP, Lukla

Over two decades, Funuru Sherpa has watched the lake above his native village of Dengboche in Nepal's Himalayas grow, as the glacier that feeds it melts.

The 29-year-old, who runs a busy Internet cafe for tourists visiting the Everest region, remembers his grandfather telling him that 50 years ago the lake did not exist.

"Before, it was all ice," he told AFP in the eastern Himalayan town of Lukla, in the shadow of Mount Everest.

"This is proof that the glaciers in the high Himalayas are melting. And that must be because the temperatures have gone up."

Scientists say the Imja Glacier above Dengboche is retreating by about 70 metres (230 feet) a year, and the melting ice has formed a huge lake that could devastate villages downstream if it bursts.

The trend is not new. Nepal's International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), which has studied the Himalayas for three decades, says many of the country's glaciers have been retreating for centuries.

But ICIMOD glaciologist Samjwal Ratna Bajracharya said this was now happening at an alarming speed, with temperatures in the Himalayas rising at a much faster rate than the global average.

"Our studies of the past 30 years show that the temperatures (in the Himalayas) are rising up to eight times faster than the global average. Melting is taking place higher and faster," Bajracharya told AFP.

"The melting of glaciers and formation of glacier lakes is a key indicator of the temperature rise. And lately, we have seen massive ice melt."

Nepal has more than 2,300 glacial lakes

and experts say at least 20 are in danger of bursting.

At almost one square kilometre (0.38 square miles), the Imja lake is the country's second biggest, estimated to hold 36 million cubic metres (47 million cubic yards) of water, and is considered the biggest flood threat.

It is a subject close to the heart of Nepalese mountaineer Apa Sherpa, who has climbed Everest a record 19 times.

In 1985 Apa Sherpa lost his house and farm when the Dig Tsho glacial lake burst, causing a giant wave to flow down the mountain.

Seven people were killed by the flood, which swept away bridges and houses and destroyed a new hydropower station.

"For me, climate change is personal," said the climber, who dedicated his latest Everest expedition to raising awareness of the impact of climate change on mountain communities.

"There's probably no one who can relate to this issue in the way that I can."

Information about how many people would be affected by a glacial lake bursting remains limited, but experts say the floodwaters could reach as far as Nepal's southern plains and beyond.

Environment secretary Uday Raj Sharma said last week the bursting of the Imja lake would be like a "Nepalese tsunami," comparing it with the 2004 Indian Ocean disaster in which around 220,000 people died.

The government has asked international donors for help in tackling the hazardous glacial lakes, which will be discussed at regional talks here next week aimed at highlighting the dangers climate change poses to the Himalayas.

But experts say there are no easy solutions.