

Bhutan blamed for devastation in Manas National Park



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Mubina Akhtar 15 October 2016 Updated 16 Oct 43487 views

The Manas [National](#) Park and Tiger Reserve suffered huge loss [as](#) flood [waters](#) of river Beki inundated 60 per cent of the Park since the last four days. Floodwaters entered the Park breaching the embankment at Panchmile under the Bansbari Range and submerged large areas of [National](#) Park on Wednesday night. The release of [waters](#) from the Kurichu dam by Bhutan has been attributed to the untimely disaster. “The [waters](#) have receded now but have left a trail of devastation. The flood breached the embankment at three sites making the Park all the more vulnerable, besides damaging most of the [roads](#) making movement almost impossible,” Dharanidhar Boro, deputy director of the Park said. “The bridge at Lata jhar was washed away cutting off road communication to Bhutan. The picturesque Mathanguri, main attraction for tourists, remains cut off [as](#) the road to Mathanguri was also washed away. Many animals took shelter on narrow strips of highlands. However, there were no reports of [animal](#) casualties. The forest beat [camps](#) in the Park---Bispaani, Burha-burijhar, Latajhar, Kuribeel, Bhatgali, Kahibari, Katajhar were reeling under 5/[6](#) ft of flood water,” Boro added.

Manas [National](#) Park was opened for tourists on October 1 but authorities are now seriously thinking of limiting tourist access to the Park. Tourism in Manas suffered a setback during the 90s due to insurgent activities. Since the last [10](#) years Manas has been gearing up to make up for the loss of those years. The Park has also seen an increase in the number of footfalls since the last few years. But with the opening of the gates this ‘season’, the Park suffered a severe jolt. Tour operators [fear](#) another season to go waste [as](#) reconstruction and repair of [roads](#) will take time.



Agriculture, fishery affected

Authorities of Barpeta and Baksa districts said there was no prior warning by Bhutan about the release of water, which flooded the Manas and Beki rivers, inundating large tracts of cultivation in these two districts affecting more than 24,000 people.

Dhruva Nath, a local youth, lamented that this sudden surge has washed away the dreams of many like him who were engaged in pisciculture. Fisheries in many villages—Gyatigaon, Raghabeel, Chunbari, Kaalpani and Narayanguri received a setback [as](#) the gushing [waters](#) Beki and Manas devastated the ponds and tanks in the districts bordering the Himalayan nation.

A State Disaster Management Authority official said that 12 villages in Kalgachia revenue circle in Barpeta district were inundated by the sudden rise in water [level](#) in the Beki river.

Beki and Manas are the two principal tributaries of the [Brahmaputra](#) in lower Assam.



Earlier instances

Although there is an agreement between [India](#) and Bhutan to share information on the release of water from the Kurichu dam, Bhutan allegedly continues to release water from the dam without sharing the information with the Indian (Assam) authorities. There are instances when unannounced release of water Kurichu dam by Bhutan jeopardized the lives of thousands of people downstream. The sudden surge of water released on Wednesday once again [caught](#) Assam authorities off-guard. It so happens that during incessant rains, [waters](#) from the dam is released flow down to Assam. In July this year, there was a sudden rise in the water levels of the Beki river that washed away a part of the embankment at Panchmile, inundating the entire Manas [National](#) Park.

In June 2010, hundreds of villages in the two districts of Barpeta and Baska were severely affected. Huge loss and devastation in the floods of 2007 were also attributed to Bhutan.

In 2004, Barpeta and Nalbari districts were flooded suddenly. It was reported later that an artificial lake on the upstream of Kurichu dam [burst](#) that was located north of the international border shared by Assam.

The Kurichu continues to be a nightmare downstream, having created havoc at regular intervals. In the last [10](#) years, [over](#) one lakh families were rendered homeless while more than 60 thousand hectares of farmland were devastated in the downstream districts of Baksa, Barpeta and Nalbari [as](#) estimated by the Assam Disaster Management Authority.

Downstream concerns

The Manas River (Drangme Chhu in Bhutan) is a transboundary river in the Himalayan foothills between southern Bhutan and [India](#). It is the largest river system of Bhutan. The DrangmeChu, also the largest drainage in Bhutan with area of nearly 18, 300 square kilometers, connects the Bhutanese Himalaya and the Indian subcontinent. Bhutan decided to build a hydropower dam [over](#) the KuriChu and DrangmeChu to cope with the increasing demand of power in Bhutan. The Himalayan kingdom now earns more than 50 per cent of its revenue from its sale of hydro electricity. Interestingly, the Indian government has aided Bhutan in all its major hydel projects, including Kurichu. The government of [India](#) invested 560 crore in Kurichu. Given the complexities involved in the exercise of the extracting electricity through large dams and the haste in which the projects are pushed through without addressing the genuine concerns such [as](#) downstream impacts in the form of floods, sedimentation, deposition of sand and morain, loss of biodiversity and livelihood of people, seismic vulnerability etc, the situation definitely calls for a resentment of the Central Government's hydropower [policy](#) for the north-[east](#) Indian region, specially Assam. The [state](#) is already a victim of dam-induced floods several times in the recent past.

Further, the threat of
Kurichu looms large on
pristine wildlife
habitats like Manas—a
world heritage site, an
elephant project, a
tiger project and a
biosphere reserve.

Situated on the
western flanks of
Assam, Manas [National](#)

Park is one of the most vibrant forest ecosystems in [India](#). Situated on the foothills of the eastern Himalayas, brushing the Bhutan border, this pristine and primordial wilderness reserve is a treasure trove of bio diversity. [Chandan](#) Kumar Duarah of Centre for [Conservation](#), [Education](#) and Research (CCER), voiced the concern of the downstream people--
-“the situation prevailing in Manas is likely to happen in wildlife habitats of upper Assam when hydro electric power projects are commissioned in Tibet and [Arunachal](#). Happy Bhutan has been unleashing unhappiness in the form of water to the people of Assam for years without informing concerned authorities. While the Union Government and stakeholders are opposing Chinese dams on the Himalayan rivers flowing into [India](#), our government is not concerned [over](#) dams built by Bhutan [over](#) trans boundary rivers. On the other hand, the Union government is patronizing hydro projects upstream in complete disregard to the interests of the people of Assam downstream.”



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