

Nepal Monsoon: Melamchi Locals Recount How Floods Left Them Homeless

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A flooded Melamchi Bazaar of Sindhupalchok, on Wednesday, June 16, 2021. Photo: Bikash Shrestha

On Tuesday night, flash floods in Melamchi and Yangri rivers damaged three dozen houses by the rivers, washed away bridges, and affected more than 100 houses. Other concrete houses are filled with mud brought by the rivers. But, even now, the speed of water has not slowed down. It is still cutting away the riversides.

On Wednesday at around 2:30 pm, two desperate and terrified-looking businesspersons arrived at the Kalijung Battalion of Nepal Army in the Melamchi municipality-11. The duo reached there to meet the chief and pleaded with the soldiers guarding outside.

“If the flow of the river could be diverted by an explosion with a helicopter, it could save about a dozen houses from immediate risks,” one of them said. But, the Chief was busy in a meeting and they returned.

Saddened, all they could do was sit and stare, waiting for their house to sink. But, they are not the only two. More locals are waiting, worried their houses in the market area will be damaged or swept away.

Anil Pokharel, the chief executive officer of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority, has said the floods in Melamchi is considered as a ‘cascading disaster’. Although this is not the first in Melamchi, the scale it is today has not been reported before. Hence, he says it is an omen for some bigger disaster in the future.

Heart-wrenching catastrophe



A Nepal Army helicopter comes to rescue locals from a flood in Melamchi of Sindhupalchok on Wednesday, June 16, 2021. Photo: Bikas Shrestha

Whenever the rain stops, they turn calm in the hope the water levels will decrease. But, when it rains, it washes away their hopes as well. Well, who does not cry when their hard-earned wealth is destroyed?

With the Melamchi River on the right and Yangri on the left, Melamchi Bazaar is just below the confluence of two rivers, Indrawati.

Going anywhere near the confluence has been prohibited. Those from outside are watching the situation and river flow from the hilltop, along with the locals. During one catastrophe, no one remembers or follows the COVID-19 epidemic.

Pointing out from the hill, local businessman Binod Shrestha says, “That one-story house you see was a three-story one. Our house will see the same fate soon. Meanwhile, the CDOs are holding a meeting to distribute tarpaulins.”

Rudra Kumari Shrestha lets out a long sigh as she watches her house on the verge of sinking from Rudreshwar Higher Secondary School’s compound. “There was a shop downstairs, our room on the second floor. One floor has already washed away; the rest is sure to sink. I sometimes come here to see that remaining floor. When the Indrawati starts cutting the edge, my heart sinks too. It is eating up all my property.”



*Houses are seen submerged in a flood in Melamchi Bazaar of Sindhupalchok, on Wednesday, June 16, 2021.
Photo: Bikas Shrestha*

She had taken a loan of Rs four million to build the house. The plan was to do business and pay the loan, but now, it is all over. Her house was at a much higher level; she had never thought that the river would ever reach and damage it. But, it happened now.

One day she was a landlord; the next day she was taking refuge in a public place.

From the compound of the army camp at Thumko, local Teklal Shrestha gestures towards his house. “The white house, some 40 metres away from where the Indrawati started cutting, is mine. Yesterday, rain submerged two floors; now in the next 2 to 4 hours, it will be the next two floors. If you sit here and watch, my house will be finished in two to four hours. Everything is gone and I can do nothing but sit here and watch.”

Seeing the house where he once lived, Harilal Tamang, a traffic police constable, says, “The landlord has not returned from Indreshwar Hill. We have already salvaged the belongings.”

At Rudreshwor Secondary School, Melamchi-11 ward chief Rudra Prasad Dulal was stunned while recounting the details of the damage in the market. “Locals taking shelter in the school are asking if their houses have been destroyed?” He says that he cannot handle such questions and the number of homeless people. Dulal says he has never seen such a disturbing situation.

Now, all eyes are on the Indravati river. The river is flowing and sweeping riversides left and right, submerging the locals’ hearts. Locals who have taken shelter at Rudreshwar High School shiver at the memory of the river sweeping and sinking their houses.

Phone lines, electricity, and internet services have been disrupted since last night. Many have not even been able to contact their relatives. Roads have been blocked since yesterday.

No one was allowed to go to the middle of the Melamchi Bazaar. In the market, the traffic management was chaotic with onlookers out of their vehicles to see the floods, at different places.

Personnel from the Nepal Army, Armed Police Force, and Nepal Police are on the run in search and rescue missions.

When the bus park sank

On Tuesday night, local Ravi Shrestha was getting ready to sleep. He heard the municipality's announcement in the market area, and he naturally gravitated towards it. The city office was informing locals that there was a big flood in the Melamchi and Indrawati rivers, with warnings for fishers and others to return from the shores.



Shrestha was not interested in the announcement. His home was some 30 meters from the riverbank and he did not go fishing.

But, on the 8 p.m. news bulletin on TV, he heard the Amahylmo Buspark was washed away by the Indrawati. He was shocked. Now, the crisis seemed real. "I suddenly started panicking. At night, we could not see the water gushing, but from the sounds and the reports, I could tell the flood was huge."

The same night, they left home and took refuge in the school on the hill with essentials. Locals with houses below the main road were asked to leave their houses at night. "We do not know the numbers, but many were even rescued in the morning. But, we couldn't sleep all night."

Unlimited loss of wealth

No casualties have been reported of locals so far although three foreigners working for the Melamchi Water Supply Project have been found dead. They were alert with news that this year's monsoon would be worse than yesteryear. Whereas the flood alerts were reported early on Tuesday night. So, people did not leave their houses and even the people of the houses by the riverside stayed safe.

According to the Melamchi municipality, two concrete bridges and three suspension bridges were swept away in the municipality's ward 11 till Wednesday night. A covered hall, a city park, and eight fisheries have been washed away and many other structures have been buried.

According to the preliminary data, more than one billion rupees have been lost.