

Deaths spark calls in Nepal for better warning systems

By Binaj Gurubacharya
The Associated Press

KATHMANDU, Nepal — The bodies of five South Korean climbers killed in a fierce storm in October on a mountain in Nepal were sent home amid calls to improve weather warning systems on Nepal's mountains.

Mountaineers and officials gathered at Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital in Kathmandu offering flowers and burning incense by the bodies, which were kept in wooden coffins. The bodies were driven to the airport and flown to Seoul, South Korea's capital.

Officials said they would push the government to improve the weather warning systems to prevent disasters and minimize loss of lives in the future.

"Every time there is a disaster on the mountain, we all seek ways to prevent these deaths, but soon we forget about it," said Santa Bir Lama, president of the Nepal Mountaineering Association. "We are going to ask the government to install equipment to warn about weather conditions on the mountain."

The five South Koreans and four Nepalese guides died when they were swept by a storm on Gurja Himal moun-



WITHOUT WARNING. A man offers flowers on coffins containing bodies of South Korean climbers killed in a fierce storm on Nepal's Gurja Himal mountain after they were brought to the Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital in Kathmandu, Nepal. The bodies of the five climbers headed home amid calls to improve weather warning systems on Nepal's mountains. (AP Photo/Bikram Rai)

using supplemental oxygen.

Mountaineering friends who gathered at the hospital said Kim was a good person and an expert climber who was looking for adventure and challenges.

"He was always looking to discover routes that have not been explored and try new things on the mountain," said a Nepalese friend, Ang Dorje, who Kim had promised to meet after returning from the mountain.

"He did not want to do what others did. He was a pure adventure seeker who loved the mountains and adventure," said Loben Sherpa, who helped Kim during his many trips to Nepal's mountains.

It was the deadliest climbing disaster in Nepal since 2015, when 19 people were killed at Mount Everest base camp by an avalanche triggered by an earthquake that devastated the country. The previous year, an avalanche above Everest's base camp killed 16 Nepalese Sherpa guides.

tain's base camp. Rescuers only reached the area a day later and took two days to have their bodies recovered and brought back to Kathmandu, Nepal's capital.

Lama said there are some weather forecast systems in use, but those are all concentrated on Mount Everest, the world's tallest peak.

Gurja is not one of the region's tallest or more popular peaks. The last time

climbers were known to be on the mountain was eight years ago.

"I am going to take the initiative and demand the government install these weather warning systems on smaller mountains," said parliament member Rajendra Prasad Gautam.

Among those killed was Kim Chang-ho, the first South Korean to summit all 14 Himalayan peaks over 26,250 feet without

Chilling phone video shows passengers boarding fatal flight

By Stephen Wright
The Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia — Like untold numbers of spontaneously shot smartphone videos, Paul Ferdinand Ayorbaba's most recent was not a work of art, full of the backs of heads and the constant bobbing and disorientating pans and zooms that are a signature of mass digital culture.

But its mundane details have been transformed by tragedy into something deeply chilling — the last images of some of the 189 people who perished in terrifying circumstances little more than an hour after the video was shot.

Just minutes after takeoff, their Lion Air flight plunged into the Java Sea, tearing apart the plane and the people in it.

Ayorbaba travelled frequently within Indonesia on business and the boarding video was perhaps meant to comfort his wife, Inchy Ayorbaba, who felt a little anxious about the trip to an outlying island he'd never visited.

"It was his last contact with me, his last message to me," she said in an interview with Indonesian TV at a police hospital where she'd taken their three children for DNA tests to help with victim identification.

The images in the short video are familiar not just to the millions who have passed through the Indonesian capital's well-worn domestic terminal but to anyone who has taken a flight.

At the beginning, there's a semi-orderly queue of people showing their boarding passes to a waiting attendant.



Suddenly it dives into an extreme close-up of the pass in Ayorbaba's hand, showing his name and the flight number, JT-610.

Next, a jerky view of a bright wide concourse and the backs of people walking ahead, pulling their wheeled carry-on bags.

Then a sudden swerve into a narrower passage from where the tarmac and waiting planes are visible through slats.

Ayorbaba zooms to a waiting red and white Lion Air plane, pans to another Lion Air jet in the distance, and

LAST LOOK. A rescuer shows passports recovered from the area where a Lion Air plane crashed, at Tanjung Priok Port in Jakarta, Indonesia. Passenger Paul Ferdinand Ayorbaba's smartphone video, taken while boarding the plane, shows the last images of some of the 189 people who perished. (AP Photo/Binsar Bakkara)

then back to the boarding stairs attached to his flight. A woman wearing a bright *hijab* reaches the top of the stairs and disappears inside.

About 35 minutes before takeoff, Ayorbaba uploaded the video to his wife using the instant messaging app WhatsApp, a timestamp shows, she said.

She first saw the message when she woke up at 6:30am but didn't take in the video's details and went back to sleep. Within a minute of that moment, the plane began a rapid dive that ended in the sea northeast of Jakarta.

It was about 9:00am when Ayorbaba heard news of a Lion Air plane that crashed en route to Pangkal Pinang in the Bangka Belitung island chain.

"I went back to watching the video," she said. "I saw his boarding pass he showed in the video. I started to believe he was in that crashed plane," she said. "I kept calling him, sending WhatsApp messages, hoping that he didn't go, or something made him cancel his trip but there was no answer."

Associated Press writer Niniek Karmeni contributed to this report.

Melting glacier in China draws tourists, climate worries

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Mountain Glacial and Environmental Observation Research Station, part of a network run by the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

Nestled into a suburb of Lijiang, population 1.2 million, the station is home to Wang and his team: geologist and drone operator Chen, postgraduate glaciology student Zhou Lanyue, and electrical engineer Zhang Xing, a private contractor.

After breakfast, the team heads off by van for the day's mission. A cable car carries them up to a majestic view of the Jade Dragon Snow Mountain.

The team shuffles past a line of tourists — many in red ponchos, most sucking oxygen canisters, a few vomiting from altitude sickness — before descending to replace a broken meteorological station.

The team operates remote sensors that collect data on temperature, wind speed, rainfall, and humidity. Other sensors measure water flow in streams fed by melted ice. Cold temperatures, downpours, rock slides, gales, and glacier movement break the equipment.

"It is not easy to encounter good weather here," Wang said.

This weather will ensure Yunnan

has plenty of freshwater while other glacier loss poses serious risk of drought across the Third Pole, he said.

The next day, the team wore crampons while repairing more sensors scattered across the glacier's crags.

"Where we're at right now was back in 2008 all covered with ice," Wang said. "From here to there at the side, the glacier shrank about 20 to 30 meters. The shrinking is very remarkable."

The team forded streams and jumped crevasses in search of long iron bars they previously embedded in the ice. GPS tells them how much the bars, and thus the glacier, have moved. They also measure how much height the glacier has lost during the summer.

Back on the viewing platform, Che launched a buzzing camera drone over the white expanse. The photographs help tell a story of staggering loss. A quarter of its ice has vanished since 1957 along with four of its 19 glaciers, researchers have found.

Changes to Baishui provide an opportunity to educate visitors about global warming, Wang said.

Last year, 2.6 million tourists visited the mountain, according to Yulong Snow Mountain park officials.

On a blustery day recently, hundreds of tourists climbed wooden stairs through grey fog to snap selfies in front of the glacier.

Hou Yugang said he wasn't too bothered over climate change and Baishui's melting. "I don't think about it now because it still has a long way to go," he said.

To protect the glacier, authorities have limited the number of visitors to 10,000 a day and have banned hiking on the ice. They plan to manufacture snow and to dam streams to increase humidity that slows melting.

Security guard Yang Shaofeng has witnessed a warming world melting this mountain, which his local Naxi minority community considers sacred.

Yang remembers being able to see the glacier's lowest edge from his home village. No longer.

"Only when we climb up can we see it," he said sadly, as tourists lined up to have their names engraved on medallions bearing the glacier's image.

The etching is already outdated.

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