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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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GLACIER FLOODS IN INDIA

The advance of a glacier across a stream occasionally forms a temporary lake, which may eventually break down its icy barrier and cause a flood. A place where this has repeatedly happened is on the River Shyok, a tributary of the upper Indus, in India. At a point about 16,000 feet above sea level four glaciers protrude into the river valley, and periodically one or another of them advances far enough to dam the stream. The breaking of the dams thus produced has caused many disastrous inundations.

One of these breaks occurred in October, 1926. Another was expected about September, 1928, and arrangements were made to give warning of the break by lighting a chain of bonfires. The dam was then said to be over 400 feet high, nearly 1,000 yards long and about a mile wide, the lake behind it being within some 60 feet of the top. Owing to a misunderstanding a premature alarm was given about the middle of August.

The break actually took place a year later, on or about August 17, 1929, and warning was sent to 50 villages in the Indus valley, not only by lighting bonfires, but also by means of guns, red lights displayed by airplanes, etc. At Khalsar, where the river rushes through a narrow gorge, the flood mounted rapidly to 93 feet above normal level and fell again in 24 hours. An important railroad bridge at Attock, 600 miles from the break, was thought to be in danger but survived the flood.

Thanks to the many precautions taken, this flood caused little loss of life, but at the close of the same month a flood in the same river basin, due to excessive rains, proved to be one of the most disastrous to life and property that has ever occurred in that region.

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