The residents of Jure along the Arniko Highway had no warning. Most of them were asleep when the whole side of a mountain fell on their homes. About 40 bodies have been recovered, but more than 100 are believed to be missing.

The landslide covers a swathe 500m across, and filled the river with rocks and mud 50m thick (above). Such was the energy of the impact that the landslide scoured a heavily forested slope on the opposite bank.

This wasn’t just a humanitarian disaster, but an economic one as well. It cut Nepal’s critical trade and tourism artery with China, as well as a transmission line feeding 46MW from the Bhote Kosi to the grid. Two other plants generating 15 MW are out of action.

It was as if to remind us of the hazards of infrastructure planning in the Himalaya that the Bhote Kosi disaster occurred on the eve of the visit to Nepal by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi where proposals for major hydroprojects on the Mahakali and Karnali were discussed. The landslide reminded us of the fragile geology of the Himalaya, its seismicity and the probability of extreme rainfall events due to climate change.

The immediate task after the search and rescue is to reduce the size of the impounded lake which still threatens the valley downstream. The crisis is yet another reminder that Himalayan rivers can be unpredictable due to monsoon floods, landslide and glacial lake outburst floods. Human settlements and infrastructure have to take this risk into account.
DURING Narendra Modi’s speech to parliament on 3 August, we were treated to the supremely ironic sight of political leaders who have ruled Nepal for the past 20 years thumping tables to cheer lustily as India’s prime minister told them what they hadn’t done in that time to make Nepal prosperous.

Modi and us a dream. It was a vision of growth and co-prosperity from sharing Nepal’s natural resources more equitably. His main mantra was co-prosperity from sharing Nepal’s natural resources more equitably. His main mantra was 

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Last Saturday, a landslide 500m across fell down on the Bhote Kosi River, burying houses and blocking the river upstream from Lamosangu. This created a lake, five km long which submerged houses, a section of the Araniko Highway, farms and bajas.

As of this writing, rescue work is going on, with 33 bodies found so far, and about 150 still missing. Few can predict where and when disasters of various intensities and frequencies strike. Still, since man-made and natural disasters are common occurrences in Nepal, could we have taken general actions that might have helped minimise the adverse impact of risks to lives and property?

Accountable local governance: We have not had local government elections since 1997. In the absence of periodically elected and locally responsive leaders, a representative of the central government heads local councils, which are patchworks made up of various squabbling local politicians. Left to fend for themselves by national parties, these local politicians compete with one another to find ways to divert the funds coming to their villages and districts to themselves.

Over time, this practice has evolved into a risky form of local governance: For a fee, unelected local politicians can give you permissions to rent bulldozers to flatten sections of the hills, to mine sand from the rivers and to extract water from the ground to sell commercially, to construct hotels near the river banks, to let settlements grow into a bajar, and to look the other way when it comes to enforcing building codes. So, when disasters strike, no one can really be held locally accountable for having let the risks dangerously multiply on the side of people and property.

Spread of insurance markets: Forty-six years after the establishment of Rastriya Beema Sansthan, insurance markets, hobbled by regulations that hinder their spread, still serve a small sliver of the urban rich. They leave out the majority of Nepalis who are poor, vulnerable and in desperate need of insurance products that help them cope with the effects of disasters.

To be sure, private insurance providers will not go looking for the poor. But given that we will continue to face natural disasters, finding ways to help the underserved cope with such risks through appropriate insurance products – micro-insurance, community insurance, insurance schemes in which the government tops up the community contributions, etc – is where the government’s leadership is most needed. Examples of how to bring the poor and the vulnerable into appropriate insurance schemes could be adapted from other countries. Else, in coming times, the cost of emergency response and reconstructive relief will only go higher for the poor and the state.

Nepal Risk Board: Though the Indian Prime Minister’s speech to the Constituent Assembly emphasised the opportunity side, Nepal can be perceived as a country with all sorts of risks: labour unrest makes large-scale manufacturing challenging, political uncertainties erode investors’ confidence, a persistent lack of public services such as water, electricity and health care drive urban professionals to live and work outside of the country, a lack of jobs make young villagers go to the Gulf, and natural disasters routinely upend lives, property and businesses.

To be sure, we cannot avoid all these risks. What we can do is craft our responses to them through the formation of a Nepal Risk Board, tasked to co-ordinate the government’s efforts to prepare for and cope with the effects of risks, while educating the public about their nature.

Risks are part of our lives. But setting up institutions – local government, appropriate insurance products and a risk board – are some of the ways that help better cope with the effects next time a whole mountain falls down on a river.
Mitigating disaster

THELMA MEJIA
in TEGUCIGALPA

For some 250,000 shantytown-dwellers in the Honduran capital of Tegucigalpa, fear of dying or losing their home due to a landslide or other weather-related event has been reduced, thanks to a global warming mitigation plan that has carried out small infrastructure works in 180 ecologically and socially vulnerable neighbourhoods.

The 100×100 Plan is part of a climate change risk mitigation project financed by the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI) with a 26-million-dollar credit granted on concessional terms.

“Before the bridge was built, this area would be cut off when it rained,” Xiomara Castellanos, who lives in the poor neighbourhood of Mololoa, told IPS. “We used to come down the hill barefoot to cross the river, which rises a lot in winter, and has even swept away several houses.”

The more than 100 small projects are scattered all over Tegucigalpa, which is home to 1.8 million of Honduras’s 8.5 million people.

The capital, located in a chain of mountains that reach 1,300 metres in height, was among the most affected parts of the country when Hurricane Mitch left at least 11,000 dead and 8,000 missing in 1998, besides causing enormous damage to infrastructure.

Julio Quítizón, assistant director of Honduras’ Municipal Emergency Committee, told IPS that environmental vulnerability is high in many parts of Tegucigalpa, but “mitigation works, large and small, have now reduced the levels of risk.”

One of the projects involved construction of a small bridge (pic, above) and the strengthening of the banks of the river in the Mololoa shantytown, on the northeast side of the city, where local residents are now able to get in and out of their neighbourhood and to evacuate in case of a storm.

Johan Meza, in charge of mitigation projects in the 100×100 Plan, told IPS that the small infrastructure works include the construction of ditches, gutters, stairways, evacuation routes, pedestrian bridges, and storm water drains. A few metres from one of the city’s main roads, in the east, is La Villanueva, one of the most populous slums in Tegucigalpa. It is highly prone to landslides and the collapse of the homes that line the hillside.

Painting to the new stairways for which residents waited three decades, community leader María Elena Benítez told IPS: “We used to climb down the hill on all fours, to reach the bus; when it rained this was all mud, you can’t imagine how hard it was for us.”

“The aim is for no one to die in weather-related incidents,” Tegucigalpa Mayor Ricardo Álvarez told IPS.

The next phase of the 100×100 Plan involves climate change adaptation, which includes an intense programme of training and provision of equipment in the areas that received assistance, so people are prepared and know how to use the evacuation routes in case of disaster.

www.ipsnews.net
relations, which had hit the rock-bottom many times in the last two decades. As it turned out, India isn’t planning to gift us a hydroproject, but did promise to immediately start work on reviving the Pancheshwor dam. He announced a USD 1 billion concessional loan package that will at once counter Chinese investment in infrastructure, as well as keep at bay multilateral donors. Modi hit all the right notes: carefully dispelling any doubts about where the Buddha was born or that Nepal was a sovereign nation, not that we needed any reminding. He assured Nepalis that India was ready to walk shoulder-to-shoulder for their progress, but asserted that Nepal’s politicians must show leadership. What he really meant was: if you want us to stop interfering, don’t come running to us with your problems. Less than 24 hours later, a group of leaders met him and did exactly that. It does not bode well for leaders of a sovereign nation to go crying like a bullied child on the first day at school to tattle to the principal. Nepal’s Madhesis have fought long and hard for their rights and dignity against an insensitive hill establishment. And over the years, meaningful gains have been made, thanks to their growing assertion in the streets and in the constituent assembly. Leaders from the Tarai must have faith in the Madhesi constituency and their own leadership, and continue their struggle for political space rather than seeking patronage elsewhere.

Despite several days of marathon talks to prepare for the Modi visit, Nepal’s political parties could not muster a consensus on a draft proposal for power trade. The Indian draft had a few loopholes where amendments could have been suggested. Clause 3(b) of the proposed draft implied that Nepal’s hydropower projects could be developed exclusively with Indian investment or on a joint-venture with multilateral donors. This is not just impunity upon rights of a sovereign nation, but also violates Article 6 of the 1996 Energy Trade Agreement between the two countries that gives freedom to each side to enter into separate agreements with a third country for its benefit. Similarly, clause 4 (b) restricts licensed foreign producers in Nepal from trading their electricity in the Indian market, and 4(c) restricts the energy traders from fixing rate for electricity according to market price. We now have 45 days to get back to them with an amended draft. Then there are other pending issues like settlement of outstanding border disputes that have affected Indo-Nepal border towns. This also seems a right time for Nepal to push through long-standing plan for joint regulation to curb various cross-border crimes including human trafficking, and smuggling of arms, drugs, animal parts and other contraband items. Facing threats of terrorism and counterfeit Indian currency, a regulated border, not necessarily restricting movements on either side, is in India’s interest as well. From his well-scripted PR move to bring Jeet Bahadur home, to expressing empathy for victims of the Sunkoshi landslide, offering a grand puja at Pasupatinath, and going walkabout on Kathmandu streets, Narendra Modi tried to change Nepali perceptions of big brother India. He also seemed determined to whitewash his image from a radical Hindu nationalist back home, to a leader of an emerging superpower. His decision to resist the temptation of commenting on Nepal’s secularism, ongoing debate on federalism or the monarchy stems from that. Narendra Modi has offered a promise of change in New Delhi’s approach in dealing with its neighbours. But in the art of diplomacy, the devil is in the details. The new man in New Delhi may have sent all the right signals in Kathmandu, but it is the balsa sitting in South Block and in Lainchaur who must walk his talk.

#719
There are signs the monsoon is trying to play catch-up, but once again this week it lost steam. The fallow paddy fields in the midhills and Tarai show the effect. The rain has come down, for example it was 140mm over a 24 hour period last week that triggers the massive landslide on the Bhote Kosi. Unfortunately, with climate change we will see more frequent extreme rainfall events like this. The weekend will see clear cool mornings with hot and humid afternoons, and passing monsoon squalls over central Nepal.

Hanging gardens of Kathmandu, #710
A day at the museum, #708
nepalitimes.com
KATHMANDU

W
When you think of Darbar Marg, you picture crowded streets, busy traffic and fancy establishments. So, when you walk into couple Suman and Riva Thapa’s home located on the lane leading towards Hotel Yak and Yeti, you feel like you have been transported to the city outskirts. The duo have not only managed to create an oasis amidst all the chaos, but paid close attention to do so in an environment friendly way.

The building where the house is located was designed by architect Prabal Thapa (pic, above) who worked alongside Austrian architect Götz Hagmüller on renovating Garden of Dreams in Thamel. The building has six floors, four of which have been sublet for commercial use. The City Museum occupies two of the floors. The Thapas reside on the fifth and sixth floor.

The rooms are spacious, airy and bright. The strongest cross-ventilation keeps things breezy and obviates the need for air-conditioning. The four bottom floors, each occupying 5000 sq feet are all divided into two units, making the stair cases wider. “Space was created to make movement easier,” says Prabal. Prabal Thapa incorporated the pillars as part of the design. In many places, the cemented walls and ceilings have been left raw and bare, allowing the tenants to decorate it as per their preference. Within their own home, the couple went traditional in their choice of interior. Hanging old paintings on the walls, use of jute mats, display of Nepali artifacts and mud utensils all add to the cozy elegance of the house and lends it a Nepali touch which contrasts perfectly with the building’s modern outlook.

Greenery is a big part of this building and the Thapas worked to ensure that there was plenty of it both indoors and outdoors. A terrace garden greets you right as you enter the residence on the fifth floor, which has everything from apricot to pomelo, jasmine to bay leaves.

When people ask where greenery in Darbar Marg is, I want them to point towards our house,” says Riva. “We wanted people to feel like they were walking in a garden when they entered our building.”

DAMBAR K SHRESTHA
Events

Newa film festival, support local filmmakers, skip the mall, and come enjoy an open-air film screening every evening for a week. 6 to 12 September, Janabahal, Kathmandu

United Women, Come hear from fair trade producer Manushi on their work empowering women’s lives through tie dye production. 9 August, 6 to 8pm, Tundikhel, Kathmandu

Flagbearers, Be one of 30,000 participants to form the largest human national flag and make it to the Guinness Book of World Records. 9 August, 6 to 9am, Tundikhel, Kathmandu

Fleeting world, an exhibition of installation art, film, and drawing by Tiffany Singh. 4 to 12 August, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal

Peace puja, The priests of Patan are organising a nine-day ceremony for peace and well-being. Hiranya Varna Mahabihar, Lalitpur

Charya Nritya, Experience Kathmandu’s version of dance meditation under the tutelage of Prajwal Ratna Vajracharya and immerse yourself in nature, consciousness and compassion. Rs 1,600, 1 to 14 September, 12.15pm, inneradventuretravel.com

Navel-gazing, Learn the art of belly dancing at this free workshop. 9 August, 2 to 5pm, Core Fitness Studio, Lalitpur

Oho! The Nepali-English literary magazine Lali launches its third edition and they’ve got a festival lined up for you:

9 August
5.30pm, poetry session featuring slam poets Yuka Bajracharya, Sanjib Shrestha and performance artist Tahirim. 8 to 10pm, performance by bard Jupa. Squire Aigan, Social Nerve. Rs 200

9 August
5pm, readings from and launch of La.Lit vol III. 6pm, screening of Leader of the Bunch, a documentary about four teenage poets of Chicago

10 August
5 to 6pm, young and published poets and artists engage in interactive activities about the creative process. 6.15pm, screening of Gonzo, a film about the life and work of Hunter S Thompson City Museum, Darbar Marg

Dining

Navel-gazing, Learn the art of belly dancing at this free workshop. 9 August, 2 to 5pm, Core Fitness Studio, Lalitpur
GETAWAYS

Monsoon Madness,
get out of Kathmandu and take advantage of this seasonal offer until the monsoon lasts.
Rs 5,5552 per person for 2 nights/3 days.
Shangri-La Village Resort, Pokhara, (01)4410051, (061)-462222

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resting 2050m above sea level, the eco-resort boasts a farmhouse that stretches across a hill covered in fresh pine.
Enjoy an organic homestay experience.
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Cosy Nepal,
short, medium and long-term rentals around Patan and Kathmandu Darbar Square.
Swotha House, Patan Darbar Area, 9860117377, cozynepal.com

MUSIC

House of Music,
For five days a week, this bar and restaurant is packed with musical events that include open mics, karaoke and jam sessions. Open: Sundays to Saturdays, 4pm to 11pm, Amrit Marg, Thamel, 985-1075717

Fusion Night,
Ninad with his fusion sound, 7pm onwards, 25 July
Phras Restaurant & Bar, Thamel
9800262128, 9804080291

Lipan conjuring
Local musicians Kamarul will be performing a tribute show to legendary prog-rockers Tool.
Ar: 200/500, 23 August, 7pm onwards, Purple Haze Rock Bar, Thamel, 985-6664732

Starry Night BBQ
Spent your Friday dinners listening to soulful numbers by Ciney Gurung.
Ar: 1.40, Shambala Garden Café, Ar: Near Shangri-la, (01)4411999 ext. 7528/7515

Norwegian wood,
An acoustic tribute to The Beatles, featuring their best-loved tunes.
16 to 17 August, 6.30pm onwards, Firhur Café, Saperno

Hey Netaji
Party with Kathmandu’s hottest reggae group Joint Family International.
10 August, 5pm, Base Camp, Jhamsikhel

Shiva Rudrastakam
Nepal’s very own Vedic Death Metal band Dying Out Flame are releasing their debut album with a live show featuring fellow scenesters like Old God, Refresh, Undenied Human, Torment, Aatmagani, and Forensic Torture.
Ar: 150/350 (including CD), Hetauda, 9 August

Famous Farm,
wake up to the sounds of chirping birds and a fresh morning breeze wafting in through the aankhijhyal.
Nuwakot, (01)4700426, info@rural-heritage.com

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Rock climbing is not just for experienced mountaineers, but a vertical workout for city dwellers as well.

Nepal is world-renowned for its mountains and hiking trails but, for those working a day job in Kathmandu, it can be difficult to make an escape to the great outdoors. An alternative to week-long treks in the Himalayas? Hit the rock faces on the Valley rim.

Bikash Gurung, a freelance guide who has been climbing nearly every day for the past six years, says although the rock climbing community in Nepal is still small it is slowly but surely gaining followers. “Rock climbing is not big yet, but in the next five years, it will be and people will begin coming to Nepal just to climb challenging rock faces,” said Gurung who takes aficionados to nearby cliffs in Nagarjun and Hattiban which have routes set up.

Nagarjun Forest with 17 pitches reaching up to 40 m, is only 20 minutes away from the city centre and is a good place for beginners. Balaju is a half hour away and has nine routes from grades 4a to 7b+, as well as an overhang and a 65m multi-pitch. Hattiban is an hour’s drive south of Kathmandu and has numerous routes with varying difficulty levels.

The Nepal Mountaineering Association and Nepal National Mountain Guide Association have been promoting rock climbing in recent years, offering courses to college students and opening new routes. As roads expand in Nepal, more and more climbing sites will be accessible to drive-by climbers.

The problem at the moment, Gurung said, is one of funding. “They have a limited budget and it takes a lot of money to open just one climbing spot,” he said. “But there are plans to open a sport climbing route in the Himalaya area, probably near Annapurna.”

Rock climbing in Nepal is not just for the experienced, said guide Ram Chandra BK from Hardcore Nepal, a Thamel-based tour company that offers numerous extreme adventure tours.

“Most of the people who come to us are...
beginners,” he said. “They just want to go and have the experience. It’s much cheaper to learn here than in North America or Europe.”

Hardcore offers day trips to Nagarjun Forest ($55 including lunch, transport and equipment) as well as a four-day rock climbing clinic ($250) which is available for four consecutive days or over several weeks, depending on the climber’s schedule.

“For the climbing clinic, we teach everything from belaying and anchoring to lead and sport climbing, as well as rescue skills,” said Chandra. “It’s a really good basis and you receive a certificate of completion at the end.”

Rock climbing is addictive and many new climbers can’t help coming back for more. One of them is Alexis Amini, 21, who is in Nepal for three months doing a research project. She has been to Nagarjun twice, and is taking the two-day climbing trip this weekend.

“I first went rock climbing for an adrenaline rush,” Amini said. “I most definitely want to continue it here, I’m thinking of actually taking the four-day training course. And I would like to comeback – not only for rock climbing, but also caving and canyoning.”

In addition to cliff-side outdoor climbing, there are also couple of climbing gyms for a quick practice in the evenings after work: Astrek Climbing Wall in Thamel and Pasang Lhamu Sports Climbing Centre in Maharajganj. 
www.hardcorenepal.com
www.astrekclimbingwall.com
www.facebook.com/PasangLhamuSportsClimbingCentre

NAGARJUN
HATTIBAN
RING ROAD
In 1977, a young woman named Robyn Davidson decided to walk across the Australian desert, starting from Alice Springs and ending at the Indian ocean, crossing 2,700 kilometers with her dog, Diggity, and four camels Dookie, Bub, Zeleika, and Goliath. Davidson’s journey was sponsored by National Geographic magazine. When the article, (that Davidson wrote herself), complete with photographs taken by her friend and occasional lover Rick Smolan, was published a year later, it garnered huge public interest, so much so that Davidson went on to write a book based on her nine-month journey.

Tracks, the film version, directed by John Curran and starring the already great Mia Wasikowska as Davidson, was a difficult film to make. Any film that chronicles a journey is tricky, especially if the journey is one that is successful. It is hard to create drama out of a story where a woman walks from point A to point B, albeit through the desert and with camels. Rick Smolan’s photographs are indelible because he is documenting reality. Curran’s film on the other hand struggles with the burden of having to create conflict in an otherwise fairly straightforward story. Yet, I found Tracks strangely compelling. One of the reasons is, of course, Wasikowska’s uncanny ability to portray Davidson’s inner life and fierce determination without having to resort to words. There is also the stunning and sometimes grim landscape of the Australian desert that plays an equal part as a character in the film, an unforgiving landscape that says you must either “do or die.”

While we never quite understand why Davidson set off on her journey - Curran explains slightly clumsily with dreamy flashbacks to her childhood, with her golden retriever and a tragedy seen through the eyes of a child - it is not quite enough to understand the impetus behind such a potentially fatal journey. Davidson in real life, and as played by Wasikowska, therefore, remains a bit of an enigma. She loves her animals and her solitude passionately, and yet her life after her epic journey involves hobnobbing with the very famous, including a period where she lived with Doris Lessing, became friends with Bruce Chatwin, and had an affair with Salman Rushdie. It is a bit difficult to elide the surly Davidson from the film with the honey haired beauty who emanates warmth in Smolan’s photographs. For those who already know her story, it will require a bit of detective work trying to find where reality and a filmmaker’s license diverge for the sake of cinematic poetry. Tracks is riveting in its depiction of an unusual woman who pushes herself beyond the norm. I do not think you will regret the time you spent on it.
K U Art+Design’s week-long exhibition at the Nepal Art Council in Babar Mahal which ran until Wednesday was the creative explosion of a generation of graduates from Kathmandu University’s Bachelor of Fine Arts.

BFA Exhibition Project 2014 signified unfettered creativity as much as the discipline required to complete a four-year degree and six months of intensive studio work – the installations, even the most straightforward of which deviate from what Nepali audiences might traditionally define as “Art”, were a collective revelation.

Living as they do in a country struggling to reconcile past and present, it was no surprise that much of the work on display grappled with themes of environmental degradation and socio-political boundaries. Many of the artists drew on the familiar to refresh our understanding of a culture besieged by modernity. Krunal Rai’s startling mechanical prostheses for mythical creatures, such as a pair of shiny metal wings for a garud that flaps about with unwieldy grace at the flick of a switch, shatter our perceptions of myth as something frozen in time. The notion of beauty itself was challenged by Prajwal Bhattarai, whose “re-cycles” reveal a deep understanding of how (discarded) objects can be re-purposed to recall wholly different arenas of aesthetic endeavour.

In a related sense, Anish Rajacharya and Tsewang Lama play with reinterpretations of myth that is familiar to Nepalis. Rajacharya’s refashioning of the iconic Goldstar, the “shoe of the masses”, was simply inspired. Or as he put it in the tagline for his imaginary brand (a coat-fronted with real shoes that I was tempted to try on), “inspired by the land”. If Goldstar dares to come out with a shoe that incorporates within its design Nepal’s plains, hills, water bodies and mountains, it would be, if you’ll excuse the pun, “revolutionary”. Lama’s critique of urbanisation, meanwhile, could be viewed as one more in a long line of anguished responses to Kathmandu’s apparently inexorable decline. But his representations of the chaos of the capital churn inside of the viewer’s mind.

The style recalls the clichéd touristic vistas of Nepal’s mountains, temples and alleys; the context, confabulations of cars and concrete, quite literally demolishes that becalming notion.

I remember the excitement I felt when I encountered US-based artist Binod Shrestha’s installation, Rhythm of Solitude, at the Yala Kanya Kendra in Patan. Back in 2009, it seemed to me that installation art was a relatively new chapter for Nepali contemporary art. BFA Exhibition Project 2014 proved that explorations in this genre are far advanced. The young Nepali artists on show at the Nepal Art Council which ran until 6 August were poised, like the aforementioned mechanical Garuda, to launch into their self-defined, disparate oribits before too long – this was a rare opportunity to catch them all in the flesh and ask them about the worlds they envision, before they have quite created them.
Stephanie Luby, a professor of medicine at Stanford University, is an expert in sanitation in South Asia. His seminal article in The Lancet in 2005 which was a randomised controlled trial on the significant benefits of soap in decreasing infections in the slums of Karachi is one of the most elegant pieces on public health from the region. The good doctor is now helping with another major study to see the effect of sanitation on the growth of children in Bangladesh, reasons why just building a toilet doesn’t guarantee acceptance. Reasonable people in these circumstances may well say that just building new toilets may not be the answer. People’s desire to defecate in the open is so strong in this part of the world that the government-built toilet outside become used for other “more useful” purposes like storing fodder for cattle. Clearly this is a cultural problem and it doesn’t have a purely technical solution.

There is a parallel here with clean stoves. In order to decrease indoor air pollution which leads to many problems including lung and heart diseases, Nepal has for decades tried to introduce clean stoves to replace traditional firewood stoves for cooking purposes. Many of these smoke-free stoves are not used after installation as people revert to traditional stoves that emit soot and smoke inside homes. Cultural factors are at play here, too. The Nepal government has a target to make all homes equipped with smoke-free stoves and lanterns. But it may be important to also continually emphasise health education, and study the cultural reasons why just building a toilet or introducing a clean stove will not guarantee acceptance.

Infections like hookworm, amoebas, or typhoid triggered by poor hygiene due to open defecation so debilitate the child that the body has no strength left to power and develop vital growth. In other words, the child’s body is so busy fighting infections and resulting inflammations that all the important nutrients are diverted away from the vital activity of physical and mental growth. Children are therefore stunted and malnourished. In fact, now there is evidence to show that malnutrition during childhood not only predisposes the child to infections, but as an adult the child will also be more susceptible to non-infectious diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, and stroke - a double whammy.

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In the Ganga in Varanasi where many pilgrims bathe, a stream of 20 million gallons of sewage flows directly every day into the river just above the bathing ghats. Many pilgrims bathe in this water and brush their teeth in nearby outlets. In a smaller way, the polluted waters of the Bagmati and Bishnumati witness similar activities.

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Bhutanese refugees resettled in the UK have finally found certainty and stability

Happier days

Gopal Gartaula in Manchester

For 42-year-old Prem Giri, life is finally back on track. After spending 19 years in a refugee camp in eastern Nepal, Giri’s family was resettled in the UK in 2012 and today has a real home. He has a comfortable house, a good job, and a driving license – things he could only dream of in his bamboo hut back in Jhapa.

“The life that I have now and the one that I lived in a refugee camp in Nepal is totally different,” says Giri who lived in Sanamse district in south Bhutan before being deported with 100,000 other Bhutanese of Nepali origin in 1991.

While living in the camp, Giri taught tuition to pay for his Bachelor’s degree in commerce. When the money wasn’t enough, he cut down on food, going to bed on empty stomach on numerous occasions. But that degree helped him with his enrollment at the University of Sheffield where he studied accounting and finance.

Giri (pic, left with his daughter) currently works as a market risk analyst for an investment company while his wife Savitri is a stay-at-home mom. The couple have three children.

Like Giri, there are 358 Bhutanese refugees who have been resettled in the UK. Tara Niraula, 46, is one of them. As the only Hindu priest in Ashton, Manchester, Niraula makes a good income performing pujas at Nepali households in the area. Niraula spent 20 years in Morang’s Sanischare Camp, Sector A-3 and lives with his family of five. “It didn’t take us long to gel with the Nepali and Indian families here,” says Niraula.

Five minutes away from Niraula’s residence is Junakumar Rai’s house. The 37-year-old moved here from the refugee camp in Beldangi a year and half ago with his family and is currently taking language classes.

The Rai family receives 212 pounds a month as welfare money. “Education is free for the children and you can easily feed one person with 80 pounds a month,” she says, but she is looking for jobs and has already applied to three different places.

Twenty minutes away from Ashton, in Falkland Street is Ganga Bahadur Budathoki’s house where he lives with his family of six. His son, Amit works at a clothing factory and has already managed to buy a car while rest of the members are dependent on welfare. The Budathoki couple spent a lot of their time in their kitchen garden. “Because it’s summer, we don’t have our language classes so we like to keep busy,” says Budathoki.

Another Bhutanese refugee living on Washington Road is Kamal Kumar Gurung and his family. The Gurungs moved to the UK three years ago and Kamal Kumar who works in the food industry earns 53 pounds a day. Gurung says his earnings are enough to pay for his family. “Life is good, we are eating good food and living without any worry.”

After 15 rounds of failed talks between the Nepal and India government regarding repatriation of Bhutanese refugees, the third country settlement program was started in 2008. Along with the US, Europe has also been taking in Bhutanese refugees.
In the last 10 years, Nepal’s infant and maternal mortality rates dropped dramatically, and with it the proportion of children physically stunted due to lack of food also decreased from 58 per cent to 40 percent. And one of the reasons undernutrition still remains high is because of teenage pregnancy.

Public health experts have found that even in places where children have enough food, malnutrition remains unacceptably high (see Dhanvantari, page 14). In India and Nepal, for instance, there is a strong correlation between stunting and open defecation. And here in Sindhupalchok district, northeast of Kathmandu, the lack of progress in stopping child marriages appears to be affecting the nutrition of both mothers and their babies.

The failure to prevent early marriages threatens the 1000-day mothers campaign.

Mallika Aryal

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The failure to prevent early marriages threatens the 1000-day mothers campaign.

Sunir Pandey

Rasuwa – Mina Lo was 14 when she was married off, and by 18 she had her first baby. Since her husband left for work in the Gulf immediately after birth, the 19-year-old has been taking care of the baby boy all by herself.

Growing up in a tiny village 120km north of Kathmandu, Mina has seen her fair share of children with development disorders caused by malnutrition. “I worry that my baby might not develop to his full potential,” she says.

Nepal is among 10 countries with the highest prevalence of stunting and one of the top 20 countries with the highest number of stunted children, according to UNICEF. UNICEF explains stunting as chronic undernutrition during critical periods of growth and development after till a child is 60 months. The consequences of stunting are irreversible and in Nepal the condition affects nearly half of all children under five.

Stunting is a measure of height to age of the child, but it is also indicative of how the child is growing cognitively. Experts believe Nepal’s ranking is worrying not just globally but also in South Asia. A 2013 progress report on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) done by Nepal’s National Planning Commission (NPC) says that while the number of stunted children declined from 77 per cent in 2001 to 41 per cent in 2011, it is still far above the 38 per cent target set by the UN.

While inadequate food intake is related to poverty, it is not the sole indicator of malnutrition or increased stunting in Nepal. Since half of stunting happens during pregnancy, babies need nutrient rich food from their mothers while still in the womb.

Keen to learn more about nutrition and proper childcare, Mina took the help of Mohmaya Acharya, a Female Community Health Volunteer. Acharya told the new mother to eat the green leafy vegetables readily available in her garden and rear chicken for meat and eggs. She also breastfed her baby exclusively for six months and continues to be careful about what she eats as she is still nursing her 14-month-old boy.

Acharya says teaching about nutrition to young mothers is not as difficult as teaching them about sanitation and hygiene. A common infection such as diarrhoea in the first two years of a child life can be very risky. And if children are suffering from infection due to poor sanitation they can have up to six diarrhoeal episodes per year. All the nutrients children are supposed to be using for development are then used to fight against the infection. Even if children recover, they are not as healthy as before.

Food insecurity is a contributing factor to stunting in Nepal, and the country’s central and far-western regions are the most food insecure and the prevalence of stunting in these areas are as high as 60 per cent. Realising that previous efforts to lessen stunting had not been
“Hark bar, Akha char” (four meals a day). These meals must comprise of vegetables, greens, grain, milk, meat, or eggs. But not everyone can afford to feed themselves and their livestock and poultry, and it is particularly more difficult for younger mothers without support at home.

Anu Lama worked as a nanny in Kuwait for two years, and at 19 is already a mother of a four-month-old daughter. The family farm hardly produces enough to feed her and her baby four meals a day and she can’t afford to buy feed for the chicken to make them grow faster. Her husband works in India, and his mother is an alcoholic. Her sister-in-law is pregnant, too, so Anu has to do all the house and farm work carrying her baby around.

Across the Indrawati River in Mahgau, a village of the Danuwra ethnic group the situation is even more dire. Most mothers here are school dropouts, and in the baby after birth hampers brain development, making children slow learners. If breastfeeding mothers and pregnant women don’t have access to the right nutrients, they will not be able to feed their children, which are more likely to have children growing up with inadequately developed brains.

To prevent this, new mothers in Ichok are taught to practice breastfeeding. In Ichok, 10 km from Melamchi bajar, to take care of themselves and their babies. “We keep talking about 1000 days of mothers, but how does one arrive at the number?” Gyansendra Ghorasaini, a trainer, asks 21 young mothers who are attending with their babies. A hand goes up in the corner: “It’s 270 days of pregnancy plus the 730 days until our babies turn two.”

Ghorasaini is pleased with the correct answer, and other mothers nod with understanding. Studies have shown malnutrition in the mother during pregnancy and in the baby after birth hampers brain development, making children slow learners. If breastfeeding mothers and pregnant women don’t have access to the right nutrients, they will not be able to feed their children, which are more likely to have children growing up with inadequately developed brains.

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Interview with Baburam Bhattarai, Chairman of the Political Consultation Committee on the Constitution in Annapurna Post, 4 August

Agreeing to agree

Annapurna Post: There is only one month left for an agreement on the contentious issues in the constitution. In the current scenario, can that deadline be met?

Baburam Bhattarai: They say leave the difficult issues till the last, but before that we have to build trust between the various groups, understand their positions, find compromises. So, we are concentrating on areas in which an agreement had eluded us in the previous CA. We have agreed to find points of agreement.

How can there be an agreement when the parties haven’t even started discussing state restructuring and form of government?

I have spoken to the top leaders and we have agreed to use Tulsi channels to explore points of compromise on state restructuring, forms of governance and modalities for elections.

Have you seen any of the differences being narrowed?

All sides have to back down a bit, that is the only way we can find a solution. We also have to realize what will happen if we don’t meet an agreement. If it gives an inch, the constitution will not be written, and if that happens everything we struggled for and attained will be lost.

Does this mean you are near agreeing to a mixed system as the middle points between parliamentary and presidential systems?

Difficult for me to say, but try to understand that an agreement will be different from everyone’s present stand.

Who will have executive power, the president or prime minister?

I won’t be able to answer that because that may affect an agreement. All I can say is that we will try to find a formula acceptable to all, and we can’t go back to before the 12-point agreement to find that meeting point. Because if that happens there is a danger of another rebellion.

And what kind of federalism would be the most suitable?

This is the most crucial issue. In fact, a republic is just a political format, but political and economic transformation will happen through state restructuring. It was this issue on which the last CA had to be dissolved. I feel the parties have learnt their lessons from that and will try to find a compromise.

Which model is the committee closest to: the 7, 11 or 14-province formula?

The most suitable would be to use the recommendations of the previous State Restructuring and Sharing of State Power Committee and the State Restructuring High-level Commission as a starting point.

Will there be more or fewer provinces, then?

More than the number of provinces, the important point is on what basis we should form them. So far the consensus is to use the five criteria of identity (ethnic, community, linguistic, historic and geographic) and the four criteria of capacity (geographical continuity, administrative efficiency, natural resource base, and potential for economic growth) to demarcate provinces. The federal system will be based on these criteria, and the number of provinces will also be decided on that basis.

But the parties don’t seem to be serious about meeting the deadline?

I have said we should work day and night to finish it. Modi’s visit disturbed the government for two weeks, hence the delay. Now, we will intensify our discussions.

It is said the last CA was dissolved because we didn’t factor in the sensitivities of our neighbours. This time, some parties have made a U-turn, right?

I don’t think our neighbours had a decisive role last time. State restructuring is our internal matter, and the neighbours will naturally be interested in how that will affect their national interest.

But isn’t China worried about ethnic provinces along the north, and India about how many provinces there will be along the south?

Not at all. Both want stability in Nepal, and India wants us to rise above anti-hill sentiments. That is why they have been disappointed with what he had to say.

During the meeting, TMLP Chairman Mahantha Thakur and Sadbhavana Chairperson Ramanand Mahato complained that they were discriminated against by the Nepali state. “But Modi told us we must attempt to join all regions together,” said Madhes Samata Party Chairman Mekhraj Nishadh.

NC leader Amresh Kumar Singh reportedly asked Modi why he used the word “Tarai” instead of “Madhes” and why he talked only about projects in the hills. “There is poverty and unequal development, so I talked about developing the Madhes,” Singh told onlinekhabar.com.

During his speech to parliament, Modi talked about Nepal’s mountains, hills and plains being one, and heaped praise on Gorkha soldiers. Normally, Nepal’s Madhesi leaders don’t even want to hear the word “Gorkha” and this, Singh confirms, is what hurt them.

“Modi told us India would help in the development of Madhes but requested us to rise above anti-hill sentiments,” one leader said afterwards. He added Modi said they should think of the country as a whole and not just specific regions. This stance was confirmed by messages released by Sayed Akbaruddin, the spokesperson for India’s Ministry of External Affairs.

The leaders reportedly also told Modi that the political aspirations of Madhesi people would only be fulfilled if federalism was based on Madhesi identity. But in reply, Modi reminded them to make a garland of many kinds of flowers.

Come together

onlinekhabar.com, 4 August

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi met the Madhesi leaders from all parties together when he was in Kathmandu. But judging from their body language after the meeting, the leaders seem to have been disappointed with what he had to say.

During the meeting, TMLP Chairman Mahantha Thakur and Sadbhavana Chairperson Ramanand Mahato complained that they were discriminated against by the Nepali state. “But Modi told us we must attempt to join all regions together,” said Madhes Samata Party Chairman Mekhraj Nishadh.

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most social gatherings in the post-Modi era of Nepali history, the conversation so far turns to traffic, the Supreme Court, and the state thereof. Now, with the forthcoming Shark Summit, traffic rules will be changed. It is hence mandatory in the interest of public safety for all road users to read these FAQs.

Q: Which side of the road do I generally drive on in Nepal?
A: Generally, we drive on the left, but generally can drive on either side. Being a democratic and inclusive federal republic, road dividers have never been removed so citizens can also drive on whichever side of the road they fancy, exercising their constitutionally guaranteed right to the freedom of Movement upheld last week on the road outside the Supreme Court. Street centerlines have also been erased, they were just a humble suggestion anyway.

Q: What do I do if there is an escorted VVVVIP convoy trying to overtake me in Tribhuvan Salki?
A: Pull over, give the dirty finger while it passes, but immediately tailgates the escort vehicle otherwise you'll be stuck at the Salik forever.

Q: What are the rules on the use of turn indicators?
A: In the city: a blinking right sidelight means vehicle is thinking of turning right but isn’t sure, it could be left. On highways: blinking right signal means car wants to get out and to restrain drivers who want to get to the other side. Can’t hear you. Oh yes, anyone failing to honk incessantly while driving could have his/her/its license confiscated. Honking alerts road-users outside hospitals and schools about your presence, and failure to toot one’s own trumpet is tantamount to reckless endangerment of pedestrians.

Q: Do I really need to wear a helmet?
A: Yes, wearing helmets is compulsory for pedestrians, especially if you are walking under the influence. Motorcycle drivers are also required to wear protective headgear, but the wife sitting behind is not. Their 5-year-old son sitting on the fuel tank doesn’t need a helmet, but he can wear shades if he so wishes.

Q: What is the point of zebra crossings?
A: Pedestrians are to be allowed to cross the road at zebra crossings. This is a trick question, right? In the interest of road safety, seat-belts are mandatory at all times, even if you have been waiting at the petrol station since 9:30 yesterday morning. This is to restrain drivers who want to get out and strangle someone.

Q: Speaking of which, is it legal to carry stuffed animals on the rear window?
A: All cars must keep cute fluffy animals behind the back seat and on dashboard to make a car interior feel like home. Since we spend so much time in them, vehicles are also required by law to be retrofitted with the following accessories by January 1st: toilet with shower, small bar, gym with treadmill, broadband Internet. For emergencies, all cars must also be fitted with rocket-propelled ejection seats.

Q: What is the latest on parking?
A: Parallel parking in unparalleled situations is henceforth banned for private vehicles. Taxis, however, are allowed to park anywhere as long as they block junctions. A taxi that parks leaving ample room for through traffic is liable to prosecution under the Waste of Public Space Act.

Q: Can I use an international driving license in Nepal?
A: A valid national driving license from places where driving conditions are similar to Nepal (Eritrea, Djibouti, Burkina Faso, the Far Side of the Moon) may be used. Expats from other countries need to sit for a written exam and a driving test. Fine print: Neither the driver nor the license should have expired.

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Q: What are the rules on the use of smart phones while driving?
A: Yes. The ban anywhere use of smart phones while driving has been revoked because the #S*$& thing never works anyway. Tweeting while driving is allowed because it may be your last tweet.

Q: Do I have to be careful about honking?
A: Can’t hear you. Oh yes, anyone failing to honk incessantly while driving could have his/her/its license confiscated. Honking alerts road-users outside hospitals and schools about your presence, and failure to toot one’s own trumpet is tantamount to reckless endangerment of pedestrians.

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