



## Genealogy of Inclusive Education in Nepal

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### Abstract

*This study aims at exploring historical and transformative perspective of education in terms of inclusion in Nepal. The study further deals with paradigm shifts in education from the inclusion perspective. This is a qualitative research with systematic investigation of the developmental history of inclusive education in Nepal. Secondary data were collected from document analysis, library search, reference materials, and internet surfing. The study found out that inclusion concept in Nepal was developed basically from discourse on educational opportunities for children with disabilities. The provision of education for children with disabilities was incorporated in special education policies. The changing paradigm in education took place along with changing political landscapes of Nepal. The education policies of Nepal are also influenced by international contexts and policy provisions which are acting as source and also the pressurizer for developing and revising national policies.*

### The Context

The concept of inclusion emerged since the raise of voice for the rights and choices of the people in the names of human rights and democracy. It is believed that democratic culture cultivates and fosters the practice of inclusion with an objective of ensuring social justice (Young, 2000) in various areas of

human living. Inclusion is not just a subject, but a philosophy, a mission and a tool for making the world better for living. In the present world, the term 'inclusion' has been one of the most cross cutting issue to be discoursed, to be achieved, and to be ensured. The philosophy of inclusion is equally applicable in the domains such as education,

health, economy, social etc. In education, inclusion is considered as a dynamic process where diversity of the students in their local education institutions is respected and acknowledged (Booth and Ainscow 2002). The 'inclusion' being a philosophy encompasses widely the differences, and diversity valuing, respecting, and acknowledging them. Therefore, inclusion is defined as human right whose aim is to embrace all people irrespective of their various backgrounds such as race, gender, disability, and ethnicity or with their medical or other needs. It is such an environment that fosters equality, equity, participation, access and justice in educational, social, cultural, and other aspects of human life. Hence, it is a multidimensional concept with goal of affecting and flourishing the life of entire human kind.

The nature is diverse and its diversity is posing both opportunities and challenges to human civilization. The diversity reflects not only in geography, flora, and fauna, but greatly among human beings. The diversity among human lies in multiple areas such as physique, living, interests, opportunities, access, resourcefulness etc. Such diversity sometime creates disparity among the people in the societies across the world. The disparity among the people of the world in the accessibility on resources, opportunities and enjoying decent life is a cruel reality of the world. In this context, education is one of the major aspects of human life for which the people around the world are longing to access, and get the quality of its best. In course of the development of education and enhancing its opportunities to all people of the world, opportunities to education are expanded under various plans, programs, names and titles; specifically, for those with disabilities. In this context, the special education provision was designed to enhance access in educational opportunities.

The term 'Special Education' was in formal operation till the World Conference on Special Needs Education on 1990. The conference at Salamanca brought the term 'Special Needs Education' thereafter in operation along with the reaffirmation and endorsement of the slogan "Education for All" (UNESCO, 1994). The Salamanca conference endorsed a Framework for Action on Special Needs Education with the spirit of providing education for disabilities in regular education system with the consideration of their unique characteristics, interests and learning needs. The Conference further declared that regular schools with inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discrimination prevailing in education system across the world. This statement was the real point of departure to inclusive education from special needs education.

Having wide similarities with Special Needs Education, the notion of inclusion in education i.e. inclusive education came up with some peculiar tenets. Apart from many similarities with special needs education, inclusive education adopted the failures and challenges posed during implementation of Salamanca Framework for Action to meet the objective of Education for All. The Dakar Framework for Action (World Education Forum, 2000) enhanced the agendas like equitable access, role of community, ensuring the use of ICT in learning, expanding comprehensive early childhood care, enhancing quality education, and learning essential life skills. The inclusive education embraces all such qualities which are characterized Salamanca Conference and Dakar Framework for Action.

## **Methods**

The study is a qualitative research with systematic investigation of the developmental history of inclusive education

in Nepal incorporating past events, ideas, and provisions. The study work used secondary sources like documents, artifacts, records to interpret, and explains causes, understand succeeding events, present effects, and anticipate future courses and trends.

## **Historical Perspectives**

### **Special education**

The history of special education has not been more than some decades in Nepal. The term "Special Education" was used for the first time in Nepal by the Basic and Primary Education Project (BPEP 1992). Before this period, there were some schools (for example, Laboratory School for blind students in Kirtipur 1964, School for the Deaf, Naxal, 1966, and Nepal Andha Apanga Sangh Jorpati, 1969) were established for teaching students with disabilities inside Kathmandu (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2003). Some of the schools outside Kathmandu Valley also started teaching students with disabilities. These endeavors were basically carried out by people of the communities with their own efforts. Later, a new Education Act 1971 was coming into existence under National Education System Plan (NESP, 1971). The Act encompassed legal provision regarding educating people with disabilities for the first time in Nepal (NESP, 1971). The provision of education for students with disabilities provided a clear base and led to the establishment of special and integrated schools. The Education Act 1971 followed the spirit of NESP and incorporated special education provision for students with disabilities which made easier for the continuation of policy development in the later years basically for the educational rights of the people with disabilities and other marginalized groups. The establishment of Special Education Council in 1973 was simply a breakthrough in the field of special education which strengthened the hope of

further educational development of education in the country from right based perspectives.

### **Special needs education**

The term "Special Needs Education" was first used in the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, 1994 which endorsed the notion of Special Needs Education in place of Special Education (UNESCO, 1994). Thenceforth, Nepal also adopted the educational visions, philosophies and provisions approved by this framework. The adoption of the provisions of Salamanca Statements, there had been a shift on educational paradigm in the country along with the educational provision. Nepal also replaced the term "Special Education" with "Special Needs Education" and made some fundamental improvements in instructional activities by considering the needs of children, and placing the students at the center of educational system. The notion of Special Needs Education came up with the idea of finding individual needs of the children and adopting child centered pedagogy for instruction considering their individual differences (UNESCO, 1994). Furthermore, it incorporated gifted and talented, and other groups of minorities along with the students with disabilities. Even these days, some of our institutions (Special Needs Education Department under Faculty of Education, Tribhuvan University Nepal; for example,) are still using this term.

### **Inclusive education**

The term "inclusive education" was initiated from the word "inclusion" which was widely used in sociology referring as means of social justice to be provided to the disconnected people of the society. The Advanced Oxford Dictionary defines inclusion as 'including a part in a whole'. In educational world, inclusive education has become a prominent issue, philosophy, methods and goal as

thought of being panacea for many existing problems and challenges of education which the entire world is facing. The concept of Inclusive Education was developed in the World Conference on Special Needs Education held in Salamanca, Spain in 1994. The basic premise behind inclusive education is that the school should meet the educational needs of all children irrespective of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other factors interfering in their learning (Kafle, 2002; as cited by CERID, 2006). Similarly, inclusive education is defined as a range of strategies, activities, and processes seeking universal right to quality, relevant and appropriate education (The Atlas Alliance, 2008). The quality education is ensured by increasing participation for all and responding to the diversity of children's background (Department of Basic Education, 2011; Garguilo & Metcalf, 2017)

### **Changing Paradigms of Inclusion in Education**

The concept of inclusion in education was emerged from the social justice and human right perspectives in education. But the 'inclusion' concept has been evolving with the development of various perspectives of different tiers of right to education. The paradigm shift of education towards inclusive education can be summarized into following titles:

#### **The charity based concept**

The educational opportunities to the children with disabilities opens from charity based concept where the education was not the matter of rights and choice but was the matter of charity. Educational opportunities were provided for few people who were so called normal and elite with authority and power. Children with disabilities, different race, culture, language, gender and other marginalization were denied to receive

education in the past (Banks & Banks, 2013 as cited by Heward, 2013). The footing of special education was the charity based notion of the people before the concept of human/civil right was emerged. In Nepal, before the advent of Democracy in 1992, education system was mostly guided by charity based concept where educating children with disabilities, girl child, poor and disadvantaged was the matter of parental choice; thereby did not have good schooling opportunities. Furthermore, here were no such legal provisions mandating the parents to send their children to school. Schooling opportunity of such children depended upon the discretion of the parents.

#### **The rights based concept**

The United Nations Charter 1947 was the most important document which opened an avenue for right based concept in education. In the same vein, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 provided guidelines to the whole world to shape their education system right based, accessible, participatory and hence, inclusive in nature. The Declaration affirmed individual's rights regarding education, freedom and justice to strengthening dignity and respect of the people. Nepal has ratified most of the international laws and provisions (UNCRPD, an Optional Protocol, Dakar Framework for Action 2000, Incheon Declaration 2015 etc., for example) regarding rights of education to all the children.

#### **The social acceptance concept**

The issue of social acceptance of certain groups of children has been remained for long. The issue still prevails in many societies across the world in the form of false belief, taboo, malpractices etc. especially with children with disabilities. This is still clearer in case when children with disabilities are supposed to go to school. There are a large

number of people across the world who still does not believe in ability and strength of the people with disabilities. They are not well convinced about the importance of education for children with disabilities and usually perceive the efforts of providing education to the children with disabilities are useless. This is also true for few Nepalese societies too. However, raising social awareness, increased right based concepts, success stories of people with disabilities, favorable laws and litigations, human right movements etc. are playing significant roles in changing scenario of social acceptance of the children with disabilities in Nepal.

#### **International Context: The Treaties and Plans**

The roots of the development of inclusive concept in Nepal are many international provisions emerged during different time period in the form of treaties, declarations, resolutions, principles and guidelines etc. (UNICEF, 2003). Such international efforts and initiatives were basically to ensure access, participation, equality, and opportunities of disadvantaged, marginalized and disconnected people. A number of state laws related to promoting inclusion and social justice are shaped by different provisions mentioned in international conventions, treaties, and laws. The provisions such as child rights, woman rights, rights of disabled people etc. were to promote human rights and social justice in the society in particular and nation at large. Nepal has been adopting and ratified many international provisions regarding inclusion of people in state mechanism, enjoy their rights & choices, freedom, and develop their potentials.

#### **National Context: The Laws and Policies**

Since national education laws and policies have been heavily influenced by international laws, litigations, and provisions, Nepal has

been developing and advancing its education policy provisions and judicial system as per the need of people to enjoy full democratic environment. However, since 1970, Nepal started its educational journey through a new avenue with the comprehensive education plan (National Education System Plan, NESP 1971) incorporating educational opportunity for people with disabilities. The plan provided a framework to establish 'Special Education Council 1973' as an apex body to formulate policies for developing special education in Nepal. Since then, most of the educational policies, educational research study reports and other related documents incorporated more or less the issues of disabilities and special education in Nepal. In practical sense, the history of special education in Nepal was started from the establishment of an integrated school in 1956 (Laboratory School, Kirtipur); but from policy perspective, the conceptual understanding of special education was started from the formal establishment of the Special Education Council in 1973. The same structure is functioning and working for the development of special needs/inclusive education in the country till the date.

#### **Education for the Handicapped: Nepalese Advances**

The very limited educational opportunities for common people were available after the advent of democracy in Nepal in 1950. Before this era, there was a regime of Rana (a family based autocratic regime) in Nepal where educational opportunities were limited to the members of Rana family and a very few number of elites who were being favored by the Rana regime. There were few number of schools opened during the ending of Rana regime because Ranas thought that education would strengthen the people and open their eyes which could be danger for the continuity of their autocratic regime. Finally, 107 years long autocratic Rana regime was overthrown

and new democratic environment was established on 1950.

### **Democratic movement of 1950**

The establishment of democracy in 1950 was a historic moment Nepal ever achieved a great sense of dignity, proud and freedom from a century long oppressive, dark and difficult time. The newly established democratic political environment with new enthusiasm and new type of governance brought a movement to establish schools at different parts of the country and provide educational opportunities even for the common people. During this time, the major attention was to create educational opportunities in general but proper attention was not paid for the education of people with disabilities.

### **Struggle for the inclusion of the handicapped 1953 - 1971**

After the establishment of democracy in 1950, political environment was open and free to discuss the issues of education. People started to open schools in their own efforts and government assisted in those efforts. Government was also responsibly worked in developing educational access and opportunities in the country. Even, there was no structured laws and rules to govern the establishment of new schools and colleges, the movement was continued to establish educational institutions all over the country. Some of the persons attempted to establish schools where disabled people also can learn. Since the period of 1960 to 1973 was the period of extreme political turbulence, there were some good initiatives in developing infrastructures such as industries, motorways, schools, transportation etc. During that period an integrated school, a special school for the deaf, and a school for physically disabled were also established in Kathmandu valley. Other such initiatives were also made outside

Kathmandu even in the absence of proper regulatory and supportive state mechanism.

### **Period of 1971 to 1989 B.S: NESP to revival of democracy 2089**

The post NESP period during Panchayat regime was one of the important periods of development of education in Nepal. The NESP period (1971-1976) was the ice break in preparation and implementation of educational policies in Nepal. The NESP followed by an establishment of the Special Education Council 1973 and Education Act 1971. The Act opened an avenue of educational opportunities for the people with disabilities in Nepal.

### **Period of 1989 to 2006: The SNE orientation**

After the restoration of democracy in Nepal, there were some commissions formed to bring reform in education. A National Education Commission submitted a report to the government considering secured human rights, democratic values and norms, social justice, equal opportunity in education, national aspirations and international contexts. The report (National Education Commission, 1982) recommended about higher education opportunity for people with disabilities, enhancing quality in education, teacher training, students centered learning etc. Special Education Policy 1996 (Nepal Law Commission, 1996) was came into existence to socialize children with different types of disabilities, awareness building, make self-dependent, and to manage education to address the needs of all kind of disabilities. The policy is the first policy in special education to address to educational needs of children with disabilities in Nepal. Another commission on education named 'High Level National Education Commission' was formed on 1998 to bring a massive reform in education system of Nepal. The commission included



the provisions of strengthening special education by giving national priority through legal, structural and economic management (High Level National Education Commission, 1998). The Education Regulation 2002 included the provision of special education by activating Special Education Council with its term of references. The Regulation (Nepal Law Commission, 2002) encompassed some important provisions regarding special education such as teachers' appointment, establishment of new schools, and giving special services and exemptions to the special schools. The BPEP Master Plan 1997-2002 used the term 'Special Needs Education' in place of 'Special Education' which was a historical shift in the concept but a document on 'Education for All: National Plan of Action Nepal 2001-2015' (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2003) did not use the term 'Special Needs Education' rather used 'Education for All'. These shows a clear depart of education system of Nepal from Special Needs to inclusive Education.

### **1989 AD to onwards: The departures in the republican Nepal**

In the history of Nepal, the year 2006 stands for a beginning of new era in terms of political, social, and educational transformation. The country achieved a major break in transformation from the regime of Constitutional Monarchy to the Federal Republic System of governance. During new system of governance for the last seventeen years, there are number of new educational policies, and provisions took place. The importance provision on education was the concept of "Education for All" (EFA) The Constitution of Nepal which mandated for free and compulsory education up to Basic level and free education up to Secondary education (Nepal Law Commission, 2015). The Act regarding Compulsory and Free Education 2018 was another important law

for inclusion in education which included the provision of day time meal, compulsory and free education, alternative, formal, technical and traditional education in mother language (.). Similarly, ratification of UNCRPD 2006, development of School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) 2009-2015 BS, Consolidate Equity Strategy 2014, School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) 2016-2023 BS, National Education Policy 2019, National Curriculum Framework 2019, School Education Sector Plan (SESP) 2022-2030, Inclusive Education Policy for People with Disabilities 2017 etc. are the major plans and policies formulated to shape the education system in Federal Democratic Republic Nepal. These policies and provisions are basically focused on promoting access, participation, and quality in education. The ultimate goal of the policy documents is to create inclusive educational environment in Nepal.

### **Evolution of the Concept of Special Needs Education**

Special Needs Education was considered as the outgrowth of Special Education; and the concept evolved in Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action 1994 emphasizing on access and quality in education (UNESCO, 1994) through new thinking, principles, policies and practices. The conference made commitment of education through "Education for All" targeting particularly to vulnerable and those who are most in need. The term was also used in the policy document titled "Education for All: National Plan of Action Nepal 2001-2015" adopting its six major EFA goals and strategies to suit the national contexts by ensuring the rights of indigenous people and linguistic minorities to quality basic and primary education through their mother tongue (MoES, 2003). The Ministry of Education and Sports also developed a Five Years Strategic Plan (EFA 2004-2009) within EFA 2015 framework (MoES, 2003)

with the objectives of ensuring access and equity in primary education, ensuring quality and relevance and improving efficiency and institutional capacity. The EFA context helped develop the inclusion concept in education of Nepal. It is obvious that the concept of Special Needs Education came on the footing of Special Education; and Special Education was emerged and grew in the NESP (1971) period. The evolution of the concept of Special Needs Education can be summarized in the following titles:

### **The era of Panchayat polity**

The Panchayat polity was started on 1960 after taking over the newly established democracy of Nepal by then late King Mahendra. He announced a non-party system of governance with a different system of autocratic regime called Panchayat system. The period of 1960 to 1990 called Panchayat regime, there were made some important contributions in developing and disseminating the concept of special education in Nepal. The formal policy provision regarding education for people with disability was included in the Education Act 1971 which was the first education act in the history of Nepalese education system. The Act opened an avenue for the development of Special Education by establishing Special Education Council 1973 as an apex body for policy formulation in special education. The Primary Education Project (PEP) 1984-1990 came before the Basic and Primary Education Program (BPEP) 1992-1997; 1999-2004 with major objectives of teacher education, awareness building, and development of instructional materials. During that period, the Seventh Five Year Periodic Plan also opened door for an opportunity to transform special education to integrated education (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2003). Thus, thirty years of the Panchayat regime was basically a foundational period for Nepalese education

system and the conception of special education within whole system of education in Nepal.

### **The democratic era**

The democracy was restored on 1989 after the month long movement took place in the country. The democratic period was the period of freedom and choice and during the period, horizon of educational opportunities was broadened. The democratic environment developed awareness on the importance of education and enhanced discourses on reforming education system. Consequently, there were education commissions, studies, researches, plans and policies for developing and strengthening education system in the country. Tribhuvan University Act 1992, the EFA movement 2001-2015, Basic and Primary Education Project (BPEP) Master Plan 1997-2002, National Education Commission Report 1992, Special Education Policy 1996, High Level National Education Commission Report 1998, National Policy and Plan of Action on Disability 2006, and National Curriculum Framework 2006 etc. are the major occurrences regarding the development of education system during democratic era of Nepal. In this era, education system of Nepal was brought into new height emphasizing on access, participation, quality education through enhanced equality, equity and social justice which are the essential components of inclusive education.

### **The republican era**

The people's movement on 2006 abolished the regime of Constitutional Monarchy in Nepal and established Federal Republic system of governance. Following the federal system of political establishment, the education system of the country is also changed into federal system with three layers of governance i.e. federal, provincial and local governments. In this system, administrative power for managing local education is heavily



decentralized to provincial and local level. During the republican era of seventeen years, and to the date, there are some remarkable advances on new footings in educational provisions exploring new horizon of educational inclusion. Child-friendly School National Framework for Quality Education 2010, Accessibility Guideline 2012, Consolidate Equity Strategy 2014, Constitution of Nepal 2015, Act Regarding the Rights of People with Disability 2017, Compulsory and Free Education Act 2018, National Education Policy 2019, Fifteenth Periodic Plan: Approach Paper 2019/20-2023/24, School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) 2009-2016, School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) 2016-2023, Education Sector Plan 2021-2023 etc. are the recent developments of policies for improving education system of Nepal. These recent documents are guided by the notion of inclusive education philosophy and social justice in education.

### **Nepal's Educational Tradition**

Nepal's education tradition is rooted in the Vedic and Sanskrit education system where education was based on Social Value System (Sharma, 2057). The education was transferred from generation to generation and the education was to train children with social norms, behavior, ethics, responsibility and their duties. In ancient time, the education was forwarded with Gurukul, Rishikul, Pitrikul, and Devkul tradition. During the regime of Lichchhivi dynasty, arts, cultures, and education was emphasized, and teaching included Veda, Vyakaran, Nyaaya, Philosophy and literature. During Malla Dynasty, education was based on vocational skills and architecture. Similarly, Shas Dynasty education tradition was based on learning Sanskrit, Veda, Philosophy but emphasis was also given to Military education because Shah Dynasty started expanding its Gorkha territory and went into war for long time.

The modern Nepal has been passing through massive political changes number of times from extreme autocratic regime to federal republic. The instable political system has greatly been influencing the educational tradition of Nepal. During Rana Regime before the advent of democracy in 1950, there was very few opportunity of education for the people because there was restriction for common people to study and very few schools and colleges were opened targeting for the new generation of Rana family. There was no provision of education for children with disabilities until the new education system called NESP was implemented since 1971. Opportunities of education for students with disabilities led to the development of special education in Nepal. Nonetheless, the conception of special education in Nepal was started with the establishment of integrated schools; thus history root of special education in Nepal is basically the integrated system of education. Since 1971, the education system of Nepal has been following, contextualizing and adopting international policies, provisions and practices in Nepalese education system. The foundation of the modern education system of Nepal is based on human right, sustainable learning, equality and equity, participation. Recent education tradition of Nepal is going with relation to international educational contexts.

### **International Trends as the Pressurizer**

The education tradition of Nepal has been influenced from the very beginning of establishment of its formal system. During the beginning of education system after the democratic era during 1950, education experts from the USA and Germany contributed as member of education commission. (Sharma, nd). International financial and technical cooperation plays crucial role in shaping development practices, formulation of policies and programs in the developing countries

(Lallade, Radi, & Cuenin, 2001). Sometime, developing countries are pressurized by the international provisions to address their domestic issues by improving their existing laws and policies. In the same vein, Nepal adopted their experiences and ideas regarding strengthening administrative and education bodies. In the later years, international community defined education from human right perspective as most important aspect of human dignity and respect. International provisions such as the UN Charter, UN Declaration on Human Rights are such documents whose provisions are obligatory to implement for any countries of the world. Many of the documents are optional for the countries to adopt the provisions mentioned but can be guiding document for developing policy provisions in their national contexts. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 and UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disability 2006 are such documents which are ratified by Nepal and adopted in its national laws and litigations. In the global world, no countries of the world can stay in isolation; therefore, needs to be connected with the international community to compliance with global value system. In this context, Nepal has been working closely with international community to meet the best practices and value in its education system.

### **Practice of Inclusive Education: Some Challenges**

Nepal is incorporating inclusive education in its educational policies and programs for recent years. There seems to have been changing in ideology, understanding and trend in providing education for diverse groups of students. Recent educational policies are formulated in line of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4) where provisions of inclusive education and life-long education (National Planning Commission, 2017) are incorporated. There are good discourses on

policy making for inclusive education in Nepal but challenges are also many to bring it into practice (Human Rights Watch, 2018). Restrictive physical environment, reasonable accommodations to the children with disabilities, teacher's attitude, unsupportive curriculum and instruction etc. are said to be the barriers of inclusive education. Teachers are not competent enough to handle a classroom in an inclusive way (CDC, 2007; Regmi, 2017). Similarly, lacks of knowledge of IEP, lack of practice of co-teaching, inconsistent inclusive education policy are also the challenges of inclusive education.

### **Conclusion**

History of inclusive education in Nepal is not very long; since it is the outgrowth of special and special needs education. Root of inclusive education lies in the educational rights of people with disabilities and marginalization. Initially, the concept was evolved as special education and later shifted to special needs and inclusive education. Discourse on inclusive education started in the global context for two and half decades. Nepal picked up this concept later and incorporated in its policy document before a couple of years (Inclusive Education Policy for the People with Disabilities 2017; for example,). The education tradition of Nepal has been shifted from charity based to right based; and passing vis-à-vis with respect to national political changes and education tradition of the global context. In Nepal, the debates are still going on regarding the issues, challenges and potentials of practicing inclusive education. However, Nepalese education system has been adopted the concept of inclusion in education and incorporated this perspective in all of its recent educational policy provisions.

## Implications

The study is primarily seeking to find genealogy of inclusive education in Nepal. Therefore, it provides evolutionary and historical accounts in the development of inclusive education in Nepal. It further sheds light on the past and present scenario of Nepalese education system with relation to the changing contexts of politics. It explains how education system of a country is influenced by national political contexts and changing global contexts. Hence, the study will be helpful to those who are pursuing their career in education stream, university and school teachers, researchers, policy makers and organizations who are working in education, inclusion, and education policy of Nepal.

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