

IIDS INSIGHTS

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Events and Activities

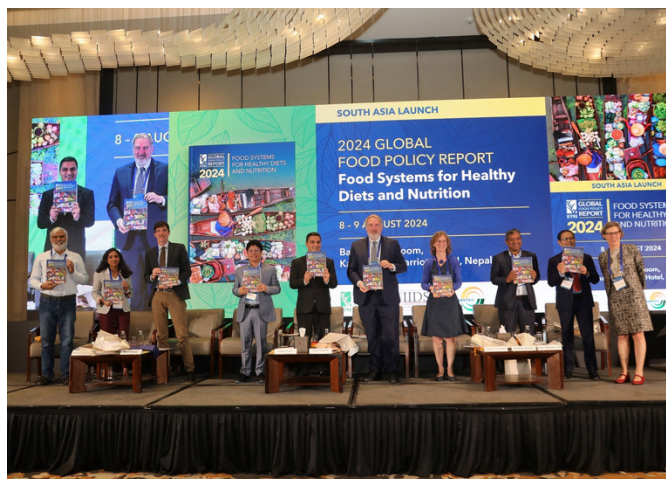


22 August - Learning Thursday: Navigating Climate Change in Nepal - IIDS interns Ms. Sheela Devkota, Ms. Pragya Sharma, and Ms. Garima Acharya discussed the impact of climate change on Nepal's agriculture and food security. They highlighted the role of Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) technologies in boosting productivity and achieving self-sufficiency. The session also reviewed policy frameworks aimed at safeguarding agriculture from climate disasters, followed by a lively Q&A session.

14 and 15 August – Digital Nepal Framework Consultation Meeting - IIDS held a Digital Nepal Framework (DNF) consultation on August 14-15 at Hotel Yak and Yeti, in collaboration with MoCIT and the World Bank. Facilitators Dr. Arun R. Joshi and Mr. Jayendra Rimal gathered insights to revise the DNF. Ms. Ruchi Pandey emphasized the need for diverse enablers, while Mr. Anil Kumar Dutta and Mr. Ramesh Poudel highlighted key achievements and the importance of collaboration for digital progress.



August 16 - Gen-AI Hackathon Finale 2024 - IIDS and AgileMove hosted Nepal's first GenAI Hackathon Finale 2024, focused on using Generative AI for local challenges. Eight teams, mentored over three months, showcased their projects to a panel of judges. The winners were: AI-based Digital Inventory for Landslides (Pooja Lamichhane, Nitesh Sharma, Yogesh Regmi, Hem Kiran Poudel); First Runner-Up: Custom Automotive Parts Design (Jay Raj Mishra, Siddhartha Sitaula); Second Runner-Up: AI Tool for Breaking Language Barriers (Dharmendra Lekhak, Sneha Ghimire, Arju Pokharel, Aaryan Rijal, Saurav Thakur)



August 8-9 - FOOD SYSTEMS FOR HEALTHY DIETS AND NUTRITION South Asia Regional Launch of IFPRI's 2024 Global Food Policy Report - The South Asia Regional Launch of IFPRI's 2024 Global Food Policy Report on "Food Systems for Healthy Diets and Nutrition" featured discussions on healthy food choices, women's roles in agrifood systems, and the impact of food environments in South Asia. The event concluded with a session on future strategies, emphasizing collaboration, targeted interventions, and innovative policies for improving nutrition and food systems, with closing remarks by Dr. Jay Bahadur Tandan

July 26 - Vision 2100 - IIDS launched the "Vision 2100" development plan, led by Executive Director Biswash Gauchan, to guide Nepal's progress over the next two decades. The session, attended by the IIDS community, focused on identifying key research areas and policy gaps in preparation for the 2024 Policy Conclave.



July 19 - IIDS Apprenticeship Fair On July 19, 2024, IIDS held its fifth Apprenticeship Fair from 2:00 PM to 5:00 PM at its campus. Candidates were interviewed across various centers, including the Center for Economic Policy and the Center for Human Assets. The applicants showed impressive passion and enthusiasm. The six-month IIDS Apprenticeship Program offers young people in Nepal hands-on experience in the development sector.

July 15 - Final Writeshop on Policy Research: Developing Policy Briefs on Agricultural Transformation - IIDS hosted the final writeshop on Agricultural Policy Research, focusing on policy briefs for agricultural transformation. The event, led by Dr. Biswash Gauchan and Dr. Suresh Babu, featured presentations, writeshop exercises, and consultations with experts. Participants enhanced their research skills to produce evidence-based policy briefs.





July 11 - In House Learning Session- IIDS hosted an in-house learning session on Medical Tourism in Thailand, led by intern Ms. Ojal Rayamajhi. The session explored Thailand's medical expertise and discussed Nepal's potential in medical tourism, engaging participants in a lively dialogue about enhancing Nepal's medical sector.

July 5 - IIDS Hike to Nagi Gumba- IIDS interns and staff enjoyed a hike from Shivapuri Gate to Nagi Gumba, followed by lunch. The team embraced teamwork, creativity, and a healthy lifestyle, sharing memorable experiences along the way.



June 28, IIDS Gala Dinner - The IIDS family enjoyed attending the Gala Dinner hosted by Quest International College on June 28 at 6:30 PM in Gwarko, Lalitpur. The event was a delightful opportunity for everyone to connect and celebrate together.

June 28 -Panel Discussion on “Unmasking the Truth: A Cinematic Exploration of Accountability and Corruption in the Public Sector”, - IIDS, in collaboration with Accountability Lab and Onion Films, hosted the 9th 'Movie On the House' event. The screening featured three short documentaries—Chyumi, Threshold, and Dust to Disclosure—highlighting corruption and accountability issues in Nepal's public sector. The event concluded with a panel discussion moderated by Mr. Arjun Thapa and featuring experts Ms. Rabina Maharjan, Dr. Anup Subedee, Mr. Sharada Trital, and Ms. Devika Thapa.





June 27 - Interaction Program with AI Club - IIDS organized an interaction program on Artificial Intelligence (AI) today. The speakers included Dr. Biowash Gauchan, Executive Director of IIDS, Mr. Sushil Bhattachan, CEO of AgileMove, and Mr. Sanjib Subba, Founding President of FinTech Association of Nepal.

June 26 - Supreme Court Visit - IIDS interns visited the Supreme Court of Nepal. They received a briefing and participated in a Q&A with Ms. Shreya Sanjel, explored the Judicial Museum, and observed a court hearing on cases of corruption, human trafficking, and constitutional issues, gaining insights into Nepal's judicial process.



June 20 - session on “Democratic Transition and Consolidation” -Dr. Sucheta Pyakuryal led a session on “Democratic Transition and Consolidation,” discussing democratic principles, Nepal's political history, and S.P. Huntington's “Waves of Democracy.” The interactive session explored democratic sovereignty and federalism, ending with a lively discussion on the role of political awareness among youth.

June 28 -Panel Discussion on “Unmasking the Truth: A Cinematic Exploration of Accountability and Corruption in the Public Sector”, - IIDS, in collaboration with Accountability Lab and Onion Films, hosted the 9th 'Movie On the House' event. The screening featured three short documentaries—Chyumi, Threshold, and Dust to Disclosure—highlighting corruption and accountability issues in Nepal's public sector. The event concluded with a panel discussion moderated by Mr. Arjun Thapa and featuring experts Ms. Rabina Maharjan, Dr. Anup Subedee, Mr. Sharada Trital, and Ms. Devika Thapa.





June 11- “Empowering Digital Rights – The session explored key elements for a robust digital ecosystem. Mr. Maneet Dhungel discussed how investment drives technological advancements, while interns Sneha and Ojal emphasized the importance of a strong civil society and digital regulations. The session also covered sectoral agility, digital infrastructure, and good governance for sustainable growth.

June 6 –Immersive Classroom Experience – IIDS summer interns visited Shree Nandi Secondary School, observing and interacting in 40-minute Math, Science, Nepali, and English classes for grades 6-8. Special thanks to Principal Ms. Gita Kafle for her leadership. It was a valuable and insightful experience.



June 5 –Exploring the Himalayas and Borderlands - Mr. Akhilesh Upadhyay, Senior Fellow at IIDS, defined borderlands and examined various security challenges, including both traditional and non-traditional threats, the lost Tibetan kingdom of Lo Mustang, and trans-Himalayan trade relations. The session concluded with an engaging Q&A, offering valuable insights and a rich learning experience.

May 31 -BRIDGING THE GAP : People and Digital Transformation - Salvia Regmi, Senior Associate at PepsiCo, Inc., led a fruitful session on "People and Digital Transformation." She discussed the importance of digital transformation in Nepal's agricultural sector and highlighted three key agro-based techniques from the United States. Regmi emphasized the pivotal role of data in driving strategic decision-making.

BRIDGING THE GAP
PEOPLE & DIGITAL
TRANSFORMATION

FRIDAY, 31 MAY
2:00 PM
at IIDS Campus, Mandikhatar

IN-HOUSE

LED BY SALVIA REGMI
Enterprise Solutions Senior Associate,
PepsiCo, Inc.

IIDS | International Institute for Democracy and Strategic Studies



May 21 -Apprenticeship Fair -IIDS hosted its fourth Apprenticeship Fair from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM at our Mandikhatar location. We interviewed 35 candidates across multiple centers, including Economic Policy, Governance, Sustainability, Human Assets, and IT & Social Media. The applicants displayed notable passion and enthusiasm.

May 24 – Celebrating 100 Interns - IIDS celebrated a major milestone—our 100th intern. The event recognized the dedication and contributions of all our interns. Following the celebration, we held an engaging panel discussion where interns shared their experiences and highlighted the crucial role of youth in promoting sustainable development and innovation.



May 17 – A delegation from the Banque de France’s Asia-Pacific office in Singapore visited IIDS to gain insights into the Nepali economy.

Precision Agriculture: Dreams and Reality in Nepal



Precision agriculture is a digital system that integrates GIS, remote sensing, artificial intelligence (AI), and software to optimize natural resources and enhance agricultural production. This approach ensures more consistent yields by making efficient use of available resources. The burgeoning adoption of smartphones and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in agriculture heralds the dawn of precision farming. Smart agriculture leverages cutting-edge technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), automation, and the Internet of Things (IoT). While technology has long played a crucial role in farming, contemporary imperatives are hastening the evolution and integration of these sophisticated tools.

In precision agriculture, inputs such as water, fertilizers, and pesticides are applied in exact amounts tailored to the crop's needs, resulting in higher yields compared to traditional farming methods (Mokariya and Malam, 2020). Computer-based applications are utilized to develop detailed farm plans, generate accurate field maps, conduct crop scouting, and determine the precise quantities of inputs required for each field. This technology enables the creation of efficient and sustainable agricultural strategies, reducing costs and enhancing yields.

The advent of farm machinery has markedly diminished the physical labor required in agriculture. Data collection and analysis have since empowered farmers to optimize their crop and livestock production. This approach, known as precision agriculture or precision farming, began in the early 1980s with Dr. Pierre Robert, who is often called "the father of precision agriculture." He investigated how different areas of a field demand varying nutrient levels for optimal crop growth, leading to the development of precision farming systems that allocate resources variably across the field (Nelson B., 2023).

During the 1990s, agricultural technology progressed further with the invention of the digital crop yield monitor and the increasing use of satellite-based global positioning systems (GPS). By integrating yield data with GPS, farmers could create yield maps, providing real-time information about crop characteristics and quality during harvest. This technological advancement eventually paved the way for automation. In the early 2000s, a collaboration between John Deere and NASA resulted in the creation of the self-driving tractor, marking a significant milestone in agricultural automation (NASA, 2022).

In the context of Nepal the National Planning Commission, in collaboration with UNDP, established a GIS laboratory within the country in 1992. Following the Ninth Five-Year Plan (1995-2002), the government began utilizing GIS technology for creating land use maps, aiding in planning efforts. In 2021, CIMMYT and NARC (Nepal Agricultural Research Council) created and introduced a digital soil map of Nepal. This initiative is intended to promote the development of market-oriented fertilizer products, support the procurement and distribution of fertilizers, and refine soil management recommendations (CIMMYT, 2022). Revisions in agricultural policies are crucial for embracing precision farming. The National Agricultural Policy 2061 seeks to enhance farmers' livelihoods by promoting sustainable agriculture, shifting from subsistence farming to commercial and competitive practices. These policy adjustments should prioritize the advancement of sustainable and environmentally friendly agricultural methods (MoAC, 2004). The Nepal government has begun to express interest in precision farming. In Lumbini province, they initiated the "Smart Village Program (2020)" aimed at boosting farmer income through Agricultural Commercialization. Notably, on February 24, 2021, the Prime Minister of Nepal launched a digital soil mapping technique, marking a significant stride towards digital agriculture.

Contemporary precision agriculture systems predominantly employ real-time kinematic (RTK) positioning signals. These signals harness measurements from the carrier wave, augmented by corrections from a base station, to attain sub-inch or even sub-centimeter accuracy. RTK technology is employed in various field operations, including tillage, planting, harvesting, and spraying, among others. While farmers perform these tasks, RTK collects valuable data on soil temperature, soil moisture, seeding depth, seeds per acre, yield, and more. Modern tools, including advanced sensors and camera-equipped vehicles, capture and transmit detailed data and images of every part of each plant in real-time to farmers, even remotely. This continuous stream of information allows farmers to promptly detect signs of stress and disease in their crops and make precise adjustments to water and fertilizer application as needed. GPS aids in pinpointing the exact location for input application. In precision farming, GPS satellites transmit signals that enable GPS receivers to determine their position. This real-time information is then transmitted to notebook computers of GPS trackers as they move through crop fields. Consequently, having accurate location data readily available facilitates the mapping of crop, soil, and water measurements effortlessly.



The Precision Irrigation Systems include drip irrigation, micro-sprinklers, and moisture sensors, allowing precise delivery of water to crops based on their specific requirements, conserving water and reducing costs. Weather sensors and stations provide real-time data on temperature, humidity, rainfall, and other climatic factors, aiding farmers in weather forecasting and crop management decisions. There are various mobile apps developed for farmers in Nepal providing information on weather forecasts, market prices, pest and disease management, and agronomic advice, enabling them to make informed choices. Likewise, Drones equipped with cameras and sensors can monitor crop conditions, assess damage, and help in precision spraying of chemicals. The maintenance costs for the necessary hardware, software, and infrastructure are substantial. Implementing these technologies demands a high level of technical and analytical proficiency from farmers, which many may lack. Additionally, farmers may encounter social, cultural, and ethical barriers that impede the transition from traditional practices and mindsets. Staying abreast of modern technology poses a significant challenge, particularly for lower-income farmers, who require extensive training

. Moreover, many rural areas lack robust and reliable internet connectivity. Without considerable enhancements in network performance and bandwidth speeds, precision agriculture will continue to face obstacles. A significant migration of farmers from rural to urban areas has resulted in extensive fallow land in rural regions, exacerbating the underutilization of these areas and further deteriorating their condition. The topography of Nepal presents significant challenges in land structure, often susceptible to natural disasters such as floods and landslides. In the intricate tapestry of Nepal's agricultural landscape, the glaring absence of essential resources such as fertilizers and high-quality seeds casts a shadow over the aspirations of countless impoverished farmers. As they grapple with the harsh reality of scarcity, the notion of embracing advanced agricultural technology may seem a distant dream, a luxury reserved for those with access to the necessary means and infrastructure.

The recent policy of Nepal aims to address the fragmentation of agricultural land. Land consolidation involves combining smaller plots of land into larger, more manageable units. This can lead to increase efficiency in agricultural production, as larger farms are often easier to mechanize and manage.

Ultimately, the journey towards uplifting Nepal's impoverished farmers through advanced agricultural technology is fraught with challenges, yet it is a journey imbued with immense potential and promise. By fostering an ecosystem of inclusivity, innovation, and empowerment, we can pave the way for a future where every farmer, regardless of their circumstances, has the opportunity to thrive and prosper in the modern agriculture.

Authored by Sheela Devkota

Sheela is a Research Intern at IIDS, working on the IFPRI Project. She is student of Agriculture and is currently undertaking her master's degree at TU. She is passionate about agriculture, climate change, and food and economic policy.

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Indo-China Relation: Ambivalence of War

In the complex relationship between China and India, several key beliefs shape their interactions. They prioritize peaceful coexistence alongside their competition for influence. Economic ties help maintain stability despite occasional tensions. Strategic rivalry is balanced by factors discouraging direct military conflict. Both nations value engaging with others to manage problems and promote stability. Despite ongoing border disputes, there's confidence that dialogue can prevent armed conflict. Shared culture and history offer a basis for cooperation, impacting how China and India interact. These beliefs heavily influence their relationship's direction.

The old neighbors have been in a constant state of competition since the 1950s with India overtaking China in some aspects during that period. (Joshi, 2021) However, China's rapid economic growth has made it an extremely threatening rival to India. China's and India's destiny is important to address the geopolitical concerns that has found a distinct room in contemporary international relations and global politics.

The recent remarks on Sino-Indian relationship have been significantly influenced by the violent clashes that took place in Galwan on June 15, 2020. China's actions along the Ladakh border have disrupted the previously established understanding known as the Rajiv Gandhi-Deng Xiaoping consensus. While the disengagement at Pangong Tso is a positive development, the military standoff at Gogra, Hot Springs, and Depsang plains remains unresolved. (Bondre, 2021)

Whilst the ongoing border tensions between the two Asian giants, war can be averted as both China and India have huge economic dependence amongst each other. Both the countries partake common diplomatic platform and especially with their engagement through BRICS, Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the ASEAN regional forum. (Joshi, 2021) The military buildup in the recent years of the countries' border region can be a mere attempt at deterrence. As we speak of the present time, the most populous democratic country and the biggest autocracy in the world have been finding alternatives to reassess the ways they interact with each other and the rest of the world. (The Economist, 2023) America and the rest of its allies believe that the friction between India and China can result in fruitful benefits for the bloc in order to constrain Chinese power.

After the territorial tensions escalated between the two countries in 2020, Chinese products had been boycotted, however the feasibility of shutting down Chinese products is unlikely and is disadvantageous to the Indian economy. India cannot risk severing its economic ties with China as imports from its northern neighbor hold significant sway over various sectors of the economy, particularly in electronics and pharmaceutical intermediates. (Dhar, 2020).

India's reliance for Chinese imports and Chinese dependence on the huge market that India provides is the key reason why the conflict between the two giants will be shelved. Neither Beijing nor New Delhi aim to escalate the tensions to armed conflict in spite of America's attempt to align with India as part of its Indo Pacific Strategy in order to constrain Chinese power. (Markey & Scobell, 2023) However, the Indian side holds its ground towards maintaining the policy of non-alignment amidst the rise in great power competition. India simply doesn't intend to follow America's lead as it views itself as an emerging power caliber.

Deriving from historical context, India and China have succumbed to international pressure. The Doklam standoff wasn't escalated into a full-fledged war due to diplomatic dialogue through international forum. The talks between the countries in the BRICS summit addressing the crisis played a fundamental role in disengaging troops from both sides which helped end the almost 2-month long standoff without the loss of life. (Fedirka, 2017) There is mutual consensus among both the parties that a direct war with one another will result to more losses than they could ever imagine. As both the countries drive to become a superpower in the Asian region, these countries aspire to pose as a positive figure in the international realm. The main strategy that these countries follow is to spread influence mainly among developing countries in Asia.

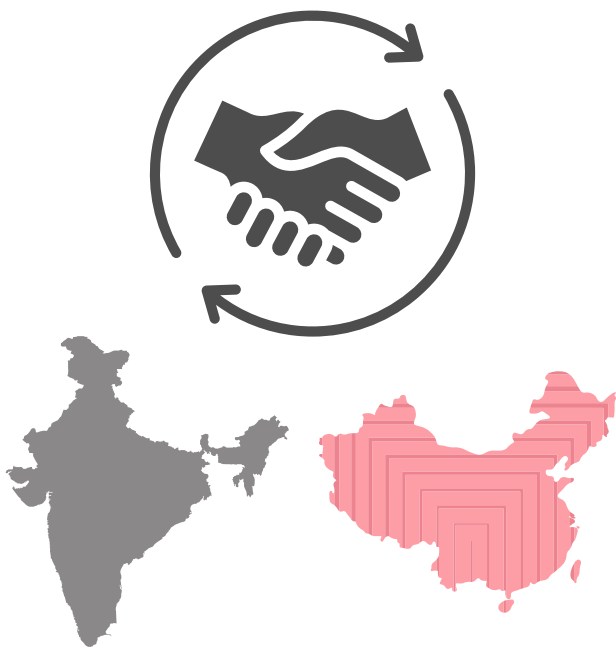


A new terminology has been borne in international relations called 'infrastructure diplomacy' which is a foreign policy goal that India and China seek to achieve. China's Belt and Road Initiative can be named under this type of diplomacy in order to expand its influence in Asia and among the African countries, which has been vital in the outward looking foreign policy approach that China seeks to adopt. The global dynamics have had a major shift which has garnered interest towards the Indo-Pacific region, lessening the global attention from the Atlantic zone. India and China being the fast-growing economies in the present context provides a competitive environment for these states to engage in a war determined through influence and power.

The outcome of a possible War cannot and must not be taken lightly. There is no smoke without fire. India and China are in the verge of a Thucydides' Trap and the question of whether these countries can survive it is an area of genuine interest among IR scholars. (Panda, 2022) India is a rising power and in order to dominate its influence in the Indo-Pacific region,

India has to overthrow its greatest neighboring rival, China. The military occupancy that has been constantly increasing in the periphery of the border regions from both the sides is a matter of concern that can ignite an unpredictable military conflict between the countries. The upcoming elections will demand more of Modi's hawkist approach in dealing with China, meaning he cannot afford to look weak in front of the Indian electorate. (Markey, Scobell, 2023) The give and take of concessions with China can be seen as a weakening stance of the Indian side.

In my opinion, India and China are already at war, both the countries aiming to expand their influence in South Asia through construction of infrastructure and extending its ports. China's String of pearl theory can be seen as a strategic tool to isolate India by surrounding it with Chinese ports in the region. The construction of Gwadar port in Pakistan makes India believe that China is bolstering Pakistan with the intention of keeping India preoccupied and contained. (Rachman, 2011) The string of pearls strategy opted by China is implied to be a threat to India's maritime security, meanwhile India has garnered support from America and Japan in order to balance the power in the region. (Rachman, 2011) India has countered China through infrastructure building in the regions and also prime ministerial visits in the neighboring countries has gained attention as India's strategy to expand influence over China's in the region. (Rachman, 2011)



Despite the ongoing tensions between the neighbors, an array of hope finally found its way through the 20th round of military talks where both India and China agreed to avoid provocative actions during the Himalayan winter and to resort to mutual actions such as reduction of troops in spring and summer seasons. (Markey, Scobell, 2023) Both the countries are keen on maintaining cordial relationships with one another in order to secure stability within the region. The military buildup concerns with national security and as an act of deterrence. Nuclear deterrence in most of the scenario's help avert possible war and is a strategic tool in the contemporary global politics.

The likelihood of conflict between China and India is shaped by a mix of political, economic, social, and strategic factors, reflecting a history of both cooperation and discord. Persistent border disputes, competition for global clout, scarcity of resources, and strategic anxieties present potential triggers for escalation. Nonetheless, mutual economic reliance, diplomatic dialogue, collaboration through international forums, and common cultural bonds provide pathways to reduce conflict. Despite ongoing tensions, conflict is not necessarily predetermined, as continued communication and efforts to build trust could promote stability and prevent escalation in the region.

Authored by Bhumika Shah

Bhumika is an Intern at the Centre for Governance, IIDS. She is currently pursuing her Masters in International Relations & Diplomacy from DIRD TU.

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Medical Tourism in Asia: A Catalyst for Economic Growth and Development

“Medical tourism” refers to the growing trend of patients from developed countries—such as those in Europe, the UK, the Middle East, Japan, the US, and Canada—traveling abroad to seek more affordable medical care, primarily due to expensive domestic medical care and frequent, extensive waiting lists. Key factors driving this phenomenon include inexpensive medical care costs in undeveloped countries, the affordability of international air travel, and advantageous currency exchange rates, and the availability of advanced medical technologies and specialized treatments in these destination countries.

Thailand's Rise as a Premier Medical Tourism Destination

In Asia, Thailand has proven itself as a prominent medical tourism destination, with a winning combination of high-quality medical care, modern facilities, internationally trained healthcare staff, and low treatment prices - all set against an amazing landscape and rich cultural heritage. With this, Thailand has predominantly used the product bundling strategy, combining services to meet the needs and budgets of a diverse range of inbound patients.

Thailand currently holds several competitive advantages in medical tourism. Besides being one of the most popular Asian tourist destinations, Thailand was also among the first countries in this region to enter the medical tourism industry. Thailand is renowned for offering high-quality services at reasonable prices, a phenomenon that has come to be known as the ‘Thai hospitality’. The medical industry emphasizes treating patients like “royalty,” with hospitals designed to feel like hotels or resorts. Thailand’s advertising and marketing further enhances its image as an attractive destination for medical care.

The Ministry of Public Health of Thailand regulates and provides guidelines for Thai hospitals to maintain their quality. Some Thai hospitals also meet the standards approved by the Joint Commission International or JCI and also other international standards like ISO and Hazards and Critical Control Points Principle (HACCP). As a result, Thailand has seen a growth of 16% per year in the inflow of overseas patients seeking a wide range of medical operations, from elective surgeries to difficult medical treatments. While Thailand's medical tourism industry has expanded quickly, it is critical to determine if this is due to a well-developed healthcare system, or simply because of another strategic business creativity.

India's Expanding Medical Tourism

The healthcare industry is one of the fastest-growing sectors with substantial revenue generation globally. A second example of this is the internationally competitive Indian healthcare industry, which has contributed to a significant growth in medical tourism. Highly qualified medical professionals perform complex surgeries at top-tier



hospitals in India for a fraction of the cost compared to other countries, attracting thousands of care-seekers yearly. Most medical practitioners and surgeons at Indian hospitals have a reputation for high-quality medical training and have worked at some of the leading medical institutions of the world. They are also fluent in English, allowing them to cater international care-seekers.

The Indian government further acknowledges wellness and medical tourism as significant industries with the potential to support the nation's growth. A comprehensive plan and roadmap have been developed to maintain India's competitive edge and foster the expansion of these industries. This ‘National Strategy’ aims to establish an institutional framework, improve the wellness and medical tourism ecosystem, build a brand, and ensure quality control.

Developing Asia's Medical Tourism

Other developing nations in Asia, such as Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines, are also leveraging medical tourism as a means to boost their economies. These countries are investing in healthcare infrastructure, improving service quality, and promoting themselves as cost-effective alternatives to Western healthcare systems. For instance, Malaysia is known for its expertise in cardiology and fertility treatments, while Singapore offers advanced cancer care and surgical procedures. The Philippines, with its skilled healthcare professionals and competitive pricing, is becoming increasingly popular for cosmetic and dental procedures. By capitalizing on their unique strengths and continuously improving their healthcare offerings, these nations are using medical tourism not only to attract foreign patients but also to accelerate their national development.

In conclusion, medical tourism has emerged as a pan-Asian phenomenon driven by the rising costs of healthcare in developed nations, the availability of affordable and high-quality medical care in countries like Thailand and India, and the accessibility of international travel. Thailand has successfully positioned itself as a top destination for

medical tourists by combining cutting-edge medical technologies, internationally accredited facilities, and the renowned Thai hospitality that makes patients feel like royalty. This strategic approach has fueled significant growth in the industry.

Nepal's Medical Tourism Potential and Way Forward

However, Nepal, currently categorized as a Least Developed Country, does not have an ideal healthcare system, and is ranked at 111 among 196 countries in the Global Health Security Index developed by The Economist Intelligence Unit in cooperation with the Nuclear Threat Initiative and the Johns Hopkins Centre for Health Security. Looking at this overview of the country's current situation in healthcare, we can conclude that we might lack the technological advancement, infrastructure and other external services to promote medical tourism in Nepal on a large scale.

There are promising developments within the country that can be built upon to further enhance Nepal's healthcare system in the future. For instance, Grande International Hospital has received JCI accreditation, a prestigious international certification that attests to its commitment to patient safety and health care excellence. Even though capturing a bigger and broader market in medical tourism might still be a distant dream for Nepal, focusing on a niche market of complex eye surgeries or dental procedures that Nepali medical practitioners are renowned for, and building strong infrastructure around such medical practices could open up a market opportunity for Nepal, given sound advocacy of these services around the world.

As both established and emerging players in the medical tourism industry continue to expand, the challenge remains to ensure that this growth is underpinned by a reliable healthcare infrastructure, high standards of care, and sustainable practices that benefit both patients and the host countries. Nepal, by leveraging its strengths and focusing on niche markets, could therefore gradually establish itself as a competitive player in the medical tourism sector.

Authored by Ojal Rayamajhi

Ojal is an International Business graduate from Thailand with a keen interest in healthcare, cybersecurity, and tourism. Currently, she is writing a paper on the potential of medical tourism in Nepal, aiming to explore new insights, opportunities, challenges, and the feasibility of this sector in the country's current context.

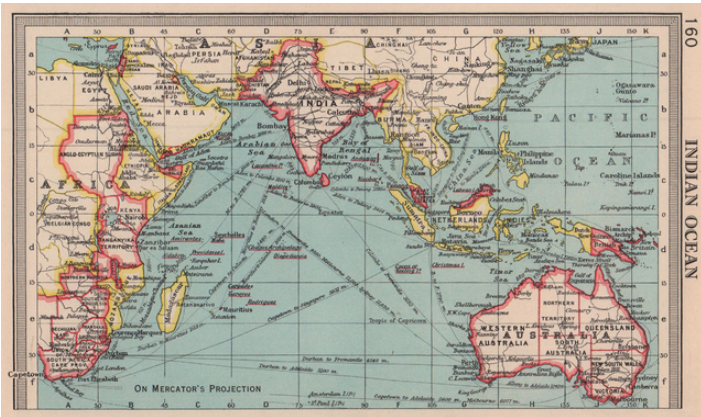
Institutional Explanations of Economic Development

Lessons from India's effort to liberalize

The concept of economic development has played a crucial role in classifying nations as either prosperous or impoverished. While some scholars believe that a nation's chances of prosperity are predetermined through endogenous factors such as its geographic location and culture, others believe that such factors are instead exogenous, and that nations can steer themselves towards or away from development. In this essay, I shall build upon use post-independence India as a case to investigate the extent to which endogenous factors such as geography influence the functioning of an economy, and ultimately argue that in reality, exogenous factors such as institutions governing the economy overshadow such endogenous explanations, and largely justify the extent to which nations develop.

Geographic Endowments and Economic Potential of India

India's geographic positioning in Asia has provided it with ample opportunities to make use of its natural resources to prompt economic progress. With abundant freshwater resources originating from the Himalayas and a climate that supports the fertility of its soil, India has largely been an agrarian economy - even today, its agriculture sector makes up around 20 percent of its GDP and employs nearly half of its active workforce (Sunder 2018). As a peninsula, India controls trade routes extending in all directions, enabling it to sustain strong trade relations with nations across Africa and Europe.



A 1949 depiction of India's trade routes. The Indian peninsula is connected to Africa and Australia through the vast sea routes and links in the Arabian and Indian Oceans. Map from 'South-West Asia Indian Ocean' by John Bartholomew & Son (1949).

Consequently, one of India's strongest comparative advantages has been its agriculture sector, whose exports alone have generated USD 50.2 Billion in the 2021-22 fiscal year, complimented by its capacity to trade (Government of India 2023). Besides agriculture, exports from various other traditional and urban industries have made up nearly 48 percent of India's GDP as of March 2023 (Government of India 2023). As a result, it has been established that India's development has historically relied heavily on its geographical advantages - had there not been an environment that fostered agriculture and trade, India might not have succeeded in developing as Asia's emerging market and a major player in the global economy today.

Institutional Inefficiencies and Economic Underperformance

However, despite being self-sufficient with the resources that primarily make up its economy, India has historically been considered as fragile from an economic perspective and has not been able to make use of its comparative advantages to the fullest (Panagariya 2004). Before 1991, when the Indian economy opened-up and liberalized, trade in India remained strictly controlled by political actors that governed the economy.

Although India was populated with an abundance of diverse industries, most of them faced the challenge of "poor quality and technological backwardness" due to the stringent regulations imposed on them (Panagariya 2004). They were further burdened by regulations such as the *License Raj*, a protectionist system that centralized the economy in order to allow the government to have a stronger role in ensuring economic development and required all businesses to obtain licenses in order to operate (Nehru 2015).



The production line of Hindustan Motors. While strict measures for licensing were in place, Hindustan Motors was the only automobile company that could operate without stringent licensing and regulations, forcing out other international brands wanting to invest in India. As a result, for many years, Indian roads were adorned with the ever classic Ambassador cars. Image from The India Forum.

While large businesses were able to obtain such licenses with ease, smaller industries at the core of the Indian economy found it nearly impossible to do so and deemed such government policies as "counterproductive" and as pathways for corruption and inefficiency (Panagariya 2004, Nehru 2015)

As laid out by Acemoglu and Robinson in their influential work *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty*, the primary reason for a nation's underdevelopment lies in the "inefficient and socially undesirable" organization of its governing institutions (Acemoglu and Robinson 2013). The policy actions taken by such institutions solely determine their prosperity levels. The case of India before 1991 clearly suggests that although endogenous factors such as the geographical advantage that India possessed opened up avenues for growth, many roadblocks created by institutional inefficiencies hindered India's economic progress.

Economic Liberalization, Institutional Reform, and the Future

Upon liberalization, India witnessed a reduction in licensing requirements, ease in trade, deregulation, and robust incentives for smaller enterprises (Singh and Ranawana 2007). India's export volumes doubled in the subsequent years, driving further growth in India's GDP and reinforcing the strength of its core industries (Panagariya 2004). By 2005, foreign investment increased by more than 300 percent, and the economy grew at almost 10 percent (Dutta and Sarma 2008). As a result of the restructuring of institutions that governed the economy, India was able to operate at its potential, and ultimately make use of the advantages that it had.



PV Narsimha Rao (left) and Dr. Manmohan Singh (right), key architects of India's liberalization, introduced reforms that freed banks to set interest rates, allowed capital goods imports, lifted production limits, and removed most MRTP restrictions. Licensing remained for sectors like cigarettes and defense equipment

Therefore, despite having the resources for development, India's struggle to progress can be largely attributed to the institutional organizations regulating its economy. While geographic factors, such as India's vast sea trade opportunities and agricultural potential, may explain what India can and should use to achieve the levels of development that it desires, it is the institutional factors that explain if and how such levels can be achieved.

Given the economic and social similarities between contemporary South Asian economies and pre-liberalized India, South Asia must evaluate its institutional capacities at the earliest to fully embrace the eastward shift of the global economic center of gravity and capitalize on this phenomenon to open avenues to foster economic progress. If such institutional factors are not checked and balanced like in the case of pre 1991 India, no geographical factors promoting growth may be able to deliver development as expected.

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Transitional Justice in Nepal : A long awaited Pursuit



PC - Jonas Bendiksen

The ten year long Maoist insurgency of Nepal was sustained with the rising influence of Communist ideology and Maoist's adoption of violent struggle, exacerbated by poor governance from a fragmented state. The insurgency was notably driven by underdevelopment, low living standard, ethnic fractionalization, political dysfunction and failure of democracy. The event has always remained the most contested struggle against the state in Nepal's modern history. The conflict between Government of Nepal and Communist Party of Nepal(Maoist) claimed the lives of 13,000 people dead and left 1,300 missing. Estimated figure shows death toll surpassed 17,000, with 2,500 reported missing.

After the Insurgency

Eight years after the end of the insurgency, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established in 2014 with an objective to investigate human rights violations committed by the state party and Communist Party of Nepal(CPN) Maoist between 13 February 1996 to 21 November 2006. The primary objective of the organization is to assess the environment of tolerance in society bringing sustainable peace and reconciliation. Victims are provided reparation while recommendations of legal action are made against the people involved in serious offences during the time of insurgency.

Comprehensive Peace Accord, which was signed between the government of Nepal and Communist Party of Nepal(Maoist), agreed to maintain sustainable peace and stability by initiating the objective aimed at reconciliation and transitional justice. The agreement on formation of National Peace and Rehabilitation Commission to establish peace in the society after the insurgency, rehabilitating the victimized people displaced by war, setting up Truth and Reconciliation Commission to investigate on human rights violations and crime against humanity by abandoning all kinds of violence, attacks and guaranteeing peace and democracy were the milestone achievement of Comprehensive Peace Accord(CPA).

The number of mass disappearances significantly reduced after the signing of the accord. The impact of mass disappearances was so significant that social order at that time was unsettled lasting psychological effects on the society and nation. The United Nations listed Nepal as country with most disappearances in the year 2003-2004.

In practice, few measures have been implemented to solve the problems of disappearances and enhance their management. The Interim Constitution of 2007 prescribed relief, recognition and rehabilitation for families of the deceased and disabled. This entailed providing aid and relief to the family owing to the report of the Investigation Commission, scrutinizing enforced disappearances and offering compensation to damaged property to overhaul infrastructure.

In the same year, the Supreme Court of Nepal mandated Nepal government to create commission to investigate cases of enforced disappearances by Security Forces and Maoists. Furthermore, the constitution advocated creation of 'Truth and Reconciliation Commission'. Bills on Disappearances Act and formation of Truth and Reconciliation Commission act of 2009 were left unimplemented following dissolution of Constituent Assembly in 2012

What caused the setback in transitional justice?

International Centre for transitional justice defines transitional justice as societies response to legacies of serious human rights violations, confronting the tough challenges with politics law and social science. Meanwhile, Harvard Humanitarian Initiative defines transitional justice as approaches that societies use while transitioning from repressive rule or armed conflict towards democracy, rule of law and individual and collective rights, in dealing with legacies of human rights. It is notable that various organizations have defined transitional justice in different terms. The theory and practice of transitional justice should be aligned in different contexts, making sure their relevance on the specific situation, Nepal is no exception.

According to Comprehensive Peace Accord, ‘Both sides shall assist each other to mark landmines and booby-traps used during the time of armed conflict by providing necessary information within 30 days and defuse and excavate it within 60 days’. The agreement, which had targeted to set up transitional justice mechanism within six months has achieved very little as parties are reluctant to abide the commitment of accord.

After the dissolution of Constituent Assembly resulted by inability to draft the constitution in 2012, significant development occurred in the subsequent year. Enforced Disappeared Enquiry, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act facilitated the setting up of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons in early 2015.

During the same period, Supreme court invalidated dozen amnesty provisions demanding the categorization of violence as serious or non-serious and amnestiable or non-amnestiable. The government was advised to meet international standard and practices in the amendment process. In June 2018, after the draft amendment bill was made public by Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, widespread controversy dismantled the possibility of bills registration

Substantial progress did no occur afterward. tTransitional Justice bill, which was presented to parliament on 19 August 2023, was problematized by Amnesty International. The bill disregarded the domestic and international legal standards. The organization emphasized that revision process should have rigorous consultation with conflict victims on the proposal.

Similarly, the term “serious violation of human rights” in the bill encompassed crimes such as rape, enforced disappearance, “cruel or inhuman torture,” and “killing someone after cruel torture killing of somebody in a brutal manner” excluded numerous crime under international law. The bill contained several loopholes that would allow perpetrators to receive amnesty and avoid prosecution. After public outrage against the bill, cross party working group was set up to develop new draft that defines serious human rights violations, unresolved cases of reparations and establishes compensation for security personnel who lost their lives or were disabled.

On August 14 this year, much anticipated transitional justice law was adopted by lower house of parliament. New law has garnered positive expectations among the Human Rights defenders and practitioners.

Navigating Challenges

The current bill classifies conflict related crime as ‘violation of human rights’ or ‘serious violation of human rights’. Latter, which includes rape or serious sexual offence, intentional or arbitrary killing, enforced or torture can be persecuted while offences defined as human rights violation can be granted amnesty. The law defines “violation of human rights” as “any act except serious human rights violations committed in contravention of Nepali laws, international human rights or humanitarian law”.



The special court can adjudicate human rights violations, which are not classified as ‘serious’ if they do not receive amnesty. With the victim's approval, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission may provide amnesty if the alleged offender meets specific conditions such as disclosing the truth, apologising and providing compensation.

Over 60,000 complaints have been lodged with the Commission for the Investigation of the Disappeared and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Provision to accept new complaints for a period of three months has been established. The term for the Chairperson and member of the commission will be four years. Given the history of underperformance, which have had ties to conflicting parties, securing transitional justice will be challenging.

Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli regarded Truth and Reconciliation report as the milestone achievement in concluding the outstanding task of peace process, in alignment with verdict of Supreme Court, victim-centric approach and international standard. Meanwhile UN Human Rights Chief Volker Türk has called for victim centric implementation, describing transitional justice legislation as significant step towards reconciliation.

Under the chairmanship of the former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, involving the Chief of the National Human Rights Commission and experts on Human Rights and Conflict, a three-member Committee will select commissioners. To ensure smooth transition in justice, the committee must ensure accountability, transparency and meritocracy based on integrity to deter undue influence affecting the reconciliation. In doing so, the spirit of supreme court ruling vis a vis transitional justice must not be undermined. The Government should be mindful that the theoretical principles may be consistent, differences in geography, context and circumstances makes one model unsuitable for another.

Successful implementation of transitional justice cannot be completed overnight. At a time when the country is struggling with the economy, managing funds for human resources and allocating resources to reconciliation, treatment and compensation will not be easier. The examples from the post-war Army Integration showcase a difficult journey.



PC - Nabin Bibhas

In conclusion, the responsible authorities must be diligent and effective in the implementation of transitional justice. They must be equipped to resist the influences, i.e. domestic or international. In the absence of transparency, the possibilities of financial corruption cannot be ignored. Political favouritism should be eliminated by promoting accountability and fostering civic engagement, prioritizing victim-centric approach as fundamental principle in enforcement.

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