

KELLY GORDON: The death toll is rising in Nepal and Tibet after devastating flash floods in the Himalayan region last week. More than 900 people died, more than 4,700 are still missing after a glacial collapse caused a landslide. Rivers of mud and debris smashed through a narrow valley along the Nepal and China border and just wiped out everything in its path, including bridges, roads, and entire villages.

Here in Minnesota, the Nepali diaspora is coming together for relief efforts. Joining me now is Deepak Chaulagai. He's a board member with the Association of Nepalis in Minnesota. Thanks for being here.

DEEPAK CHAULAGAI: Thank you for having me, Kelly.

KELLY GORDON: Yeah. So do you personally have friends or family in the area?

DEEPAK CHAULAGAI: Unfortunately, we do. One of my wife's niece's husband was an electrical engineer at one of the utilities that was literally downstream from the first point of contact for the glacier. And he is missing, along with all the 4,000-plus that you mentioned in your remarks.

KELLY GORDON: Right. And I'm assuming, obviously, people there are looking for her, but you haven't heard anything so far.

DEEPAK CHAULAGAI: Looking for him. It's my niece's husband. Yeah, I mean, they have done some-- the government is doing an amazing job, I think, in the rescue and recovery efforts for him and everybody else. And some of our relatives, my wife's relatives, had done some private charter helicopters to go to look for him, but unfortunately, we haven't found him, yet.

KELLY GORDON: Yeah, the devastation is really vast. Tell me about the Nepali community in Minnesota. It's a relatively small community?

DEEPAK CHAULAGAI: It's a relatively small community. We don't know exact number, but in the thousands here. Mostly professionals, students and professionals, like myself. It's a nonprofit organization established in 2005 or '06, I believe, been a while. And we just in a cultural Association, if you will. No political affiliation with anybody. And then try to help out in times of need like this. So it's essentially, a nonprofit manned by all volunteers.

KELLY GORDON: And so how are you mobilizing to help people who still have loved ones back in Nepal?

DEEPAK CHAULAGAI: So a couple of ways. So first, we're doing a fundraising. It's on our website and our Facebook page. And all of the dollars that are collected will be donated to the prime minister's disaster relief fund. And we've had some success so far. And some of our sister associations, like the Indian Association of Minnesota, the Tibetan Association, and others, are helping out, spread the word, if you will.

And we're also planning a vigil. We haven't gotten the approval yet, but we're planning a vigil tomorrow at 6:00 PM, at the Lower Mall at the State Capitol in Saint Paul. Once we have the approval, hopefully soon, we'll put that on our website, anmn.org, and on our social media pages, as well.

KELLY OK. Tell me a little bit more about the region that got hit. As I've been reading about it and watching some
GORDON: videos, I mean, truly horrific videos of just things being completely wiped out by a literal wall of water and debris. Have you visited that area? Can you describe it a little bit for people who haven't been?

DEEPAK I haven't visited that area, but I was actually speaking to one of my nephew, our nephew back home, and he
CHAULAGAI: used to be a telecommunications engineer, who spent three years of his life in that circuit, as he calls it. So essentially, the point of impact for the glacier to break out, the Nepal-Tibet border is a really popular crossing for Hindus and others who want to do a pilgrimage to what's called the Kailash-Manasarovar area in Tibet. So they crossed at that point and go into Tibet and take a bus and do a pilgrimage walk of, I think, two or three days to that holy site, if you will.

And so it's a really popular region for tourism. And downstream from that, as you alluded to, it's all mountainous and hilly regions. So there are narrow highways, and then there are rivers, which obviously got flooded because of the glacier. There are villages and towns along those downstream impact regions. And there are hydro projects, where, I guess, hydro projects, we have been now destroyed, literally downstream from that region.

So it's the Rasuwa District of Nepal, I think, central Nepal, and it's essentially, all the way from the Himalaya region, all the way down through hills and mountains, where people live and work, obviously. So it's been pretty devastating.

KELLY And as you mentioned, this is an area where there are a lot of power plants, and there's communication. So all of
GORDON: this is gone. I'm sure that's making recovery efforts that much more difficult for people who are on the ground.

DEEPAK Absolutely. I think, it's about 10% of all power generation in Nepal comes from that region, writ large, if you will.
CHAULAGAI: And so that's obviously a massive loss. And then there's still ongoing rescue efforts at some of the tunnels, of some of the hydro projects, where I think, they did a controlled blast. At one of the tunnels, they had some Chinese engineers, who were helping, I believe, and others. And they believe there are still some, hopefully, alive, engineers and others, who are trapped in those tunnels. And I think the rest-- as you can imagine, this debris is almost somebody described to me as a cement once the debris is impacted by the flood and water coming down. And the rescue and recovery effort has been pretty difficult from what we understand.

The other point I would make to you, Kelly, and to your listeners is that, I think, this is just me, as a diaspora, who has lived in Minnesota for 30 years and have fairly a large number of relatives back home, the government of Nepal today, at least in my lifetime, I think, is thankfully, one silver lining in all of this disaster and this tragedy, the government of Nepal is, I think, very competent today, the new government that came in. And from all the firsthand and secondhand reports that we have received, I have received, the recovery effort they have executed and are still organizing is really, really good. So that's, I guess, one silver lining. The counterfactual would be if this was a prior government, probably the recovery effort and the rescue efforts wouldn't be as at the level that it is today.

KELLY OK. I really appreciate you taking the time to join us today and to tell us, from the Nepali community here in
GORDON: Minnesota, how it's going, so thank you.

DEEPAK Thank you so much for your time. Thank you.
CHAULAGAI:

KELLY
GORDON:

Deepak Chaulagai is a board member with the Association of Nepalis in Minnesota.