

Alex and Claire updates # 1

At home in Somerset we have three Nepali mule bells; a large, medium and small one. So we're hanging our reflections on our time currently here in Nepal around those three bells.

Large bell: The Country

As we arrived in Kathmandu and then Pokhara the monsoon came to an end. Since then we have had warm weather (high twenties), stunning clear skies and daily views of the Annapurnas. And unlike last year there has been no return (yet) of any smog so that has been a joy.

Politically, the issues that triggered September's unrest remain unresolved, and burned out government offices and vehicles around town speak of a very hard few days. Things are currently calm and normal on the streets but the situation remains fragile. The protests resulted in the suspension of the previous government and the appointment of an interim prime minister who has brought in a new cabinet. The old government is challenging the legitimacy of the new government and gathering their supporters around them.

Medium bell: Our Work & INF (International Nepal Fellowship, the Nepali NGO we are supporting)

This week has seen us both start work and we can happily say 'so far so good'.

Alex is preparing for a number of workshops here in Pokhara with the INF leadership who want to address some organisational issues, and for the INF international conference in November which he will be facilitating. Alongside that, he's working remotely on a staffing project with another NGO based in Kathmandu.

Claire is building on the mentoring work she started last year. This week she delivered the suitcase full of toys and equipment that we'd brought from generous donors in the UK to the local government hospital speech and language therapy department. She'll be working at this hospital more over coming weeks. She has also started work within INF's rehabilitation hospital, mentoring therapists who are working with children with very complex physical and learning needs. She is excited to also be joining this team as they go to the Speech and Hearing Association Nepal (SHAN) International conference in Kathmandu in November.

Small bell: Us!

We had a gentle start in Kathmandu with time to adjust and reconnect with people we know as well as Alex starting work. Apart from picking up a 48 hour bug in that first week, we are happy to report that we are staying well.

The journey over from Kathmandu to Pokhara was shorter than last year, with fewer landslides and more of the road now completed, although parts of it still has traffic going in both directions dangerously sharing one carriageway. Sadly, we arrived at a point where there'd just been a head on collision between a bus and a scooter. Inevitably, onlookers taking photos quickly gathered, and we felt desperately powerless to help the casualties. Our driver sensibly decided to speed on to a police check point just down the road, raise the alarm and mobilise an ambulance. It was a reminder of the fragility of life, particularly on roads where the haphazard city driving 'rules' are lethally inadequate on faster roads.

Our home here in Pokhara is super; it has a large kitchen with a sink, a hob and eventually (this week's purchase) a fridge. It has a lovely shaded balcony with stunning views of the Annapurnas, a bedroom and a bathroom. Our landlord and

his family live downstairs but our space is private and feels a haven at the end of busy days. Inevitably, setting up home comes with hilarious hurdles to overcome. Buying the fridge was straightforward; the home delivery slightly less so. Most places don't have an address, so Claire travelled in the delivery truck directing the driver, while Alex cycled ahead. On arrival, the delivery lad put the fridge freezer on his back, wandered his way down the path from the road to our house, and up the two storeys to our kitchen.

Buying a local SIM for a phone, was equally full of "this can't possibly be the right place" moments, and Claire going back to the shop to collect some clothes she'd



had made, ended up with her being left in charge of the shop while the owner rode off on his motorbike to bring back the tailloress!

We'll be in touch again in a few weeks.

With our love
Claire and Alex

And if you're someone who prays, please include prayers for.....

- a peaceful resolution to the issues behind the recent national unrest;
- INF to continue to flourish in the complexities of being a local Nepali NGO, with a small expat element within the workforce, with international donors and stakeholders, and often delicate relationships with local and national government;
- our continued ability to usefully support in our different roles and contexts, and
- our continued health and safety.