Four-month-old Sonit Awal is pulled out from underneath the ruin of a house in Bhaktapur on Sunday, after 22 hours. The Nepal Army had given up trying to find anyone alive there, but the baby’s cries from beneath brought them back. Amidst the tragedy of the 25 April earthquake, there were stirring scenes like these from across Nepal of the triumph of the human spirit.

NEPAL REBORN
AMUL THAPA / KATHMANDUTODAY.COM
FULL EARTHQUAKE ISSUE
There is reason to hope that a crisis of this magnitude will allow Nepal’s rulers to also draw a lesson or two, be more far-sighted and not hold the country hostage to their personal ambitions. Tall order, but no harm in hoping.

Earthquakes have tectonic origins and we call them ‘natural disasters’, but the devastation and loss of life they cause are often man-made. Poorly built houses, settlements on slopes vulnerable to landslides, botched rescue and relief, all cost lives. And the primary reason for such lethal negligence lies in politics – too much of it, too little.

When you have too much politics, it means elected officials spend so much time clawing at each other to get to power and plunder resources that they have no inclination to work to fulfill the long-term needs of their constituencies. And when there is too little politics in democracy, it erodes the accountability of elected officials. Nepal currently suffers from both: too much politics at the national level, and too little politics at the grassroots where we haven’t had local elections for 18 years.

The result is not hard to discern during the current crisis. National level politicians, instead of coming together during this emergency are already trying to make political capital out of it. Vocal political leaders who don’t miss an opportunity to be seen at public gatherings to give long exhortations are conspicuously absent in the aftermath of the earthquake.

They have all gone into hiding. The ‘youth forces’ and ‘young communists’ that the parties mobilise to burn buses and block roads could have been employed to dig up trapped people underneath the rubble of buildings, take relief supplies to remote areas or help manage shelters.

The absence of elected village, district and municipal councils has been felt most acutely during this crisis. Local leaders now have no incentive or compulsion to be accountable to their people. Some residual responsibility still remains in VDCs from elections two decades ago, and other communities where there is a tradition of collective response still make it possible for emergency services to be promptly delivered. But at the national and district level, there was deadly delay in search, rescue and relief.

Contrary to what some senior ministers said, this earthquake was not “unexpected”, everyone knew it was coming. What was unexpected was that it was not a M5.3 mega-earthquake which could have killed at least 100,000 people outright in the capital. Tragic as the loss of life and damage in Kathmandu Valley was, it fell far short of that worst case scenario. The phones worked most of the time, electricity was back within three days, the hospitals were intact and 85 per cent of the residential buildings survived. The highways out of Kathmandu were open, and the airport wasn’t damaged. We may not be so lucky next time.

Seismologists have done a preliminary analysis of last Saturday’s thrust earthquake. Subsequent ruptures along the fault that set off the aftershocks trail off to the east. This means a lot of the tectonic tension bellow Central Nepal has now been released possibly postponed a mega-earthquake for now. However, this leaves a relatively high chance of another major event out of the epicentre (Pokhara and westwards) where the chances of a major thrust event is even more likely. What all this simply means is that this earthquake was a lesson for us all that we must be prepared for an even bigger one in western Nepal which could happen tomorrow or 50 years from now, but it will happen.

Nepal is one of the most densely populated mountain countries in the world, and there is no other alternative but to be prepared for future disasters. We have indications of it this time in the 12 worst-affected districts. The destruction is so complete and vast that even the most well-prepared state apparatus in the world would have found it a challenge to cope. Entire villages of 500 people wiped off the map by a massive avalanche, village after village razed, rivers blocked and valleys cut off – where does one even begin to respond? Very soon, search and rescue will be pointless; it will only be a matter of getting relief supplies in. And that means tents, food and medicines in that order.

The bottleneck is not relief material, but logistics. The Nepal Army only has five small helicopters and a large one, even with additional air assets from India we are spread too thin. The international outsourcing of aid shows that there is tremendous goodwill for Nepal, but all the food, medicine and shelter needs to be taken to those who need them most – and that job well. To do that job well, to coordinate effectively, we have to first fix our politics.

T S Karkhi
Shaking Things UP
What undermined our ability to deal promptly and adequately with search, rescue and relief was first and foremost a failure of politics.

Courage. Nepal. The world is aware, and we are sending prayers and, more importantly, donations, to help as best as we can.

Chris Winter
How to cope with a disaster?

The capital has an acute shortage of open space, not because we don’t have them but some of them have been usurped by the state or parastatal institutions and public utilities like schools, even politically connected ones (‘Second night in the open’, eSpecial).

Even those still empty have turned into ugly looking caricatures of parks.

Grimalzee
Aftershocks

After the Nepal quake, epicones are going to be a serious issue. Awareness needs to be raised to some extent but I guess some new strategies must be thought out.

KK
Tears well up, as we see the heart-breaking pictures of Nepal in ruins. We pray and hope that people may still be alive under the debris. It will definitely be a herculean task to resurrect the economy of Nepal. But we see, that of Nepal will once again rise like phoenix and stand tall like mighty Himalayas. As they know while the Nepal earthquake may crumble buildings, it will never crush the spirit of brave people of Nepal.

Ashis
The earthquake today will be growth tomorrow. Do not be discouraged.

Alejandro Alvarez
It’s their luck that they survived (‘Thanking the Living Goddess for life’, nepalitimes.com). How could a girl, believed to be a living goddess stop a house from going down? I don’t believe she saved her family by using her divine power. It was just a coincidence. Worshiping the living goddess is part of our tradition but we should not be blinded by faith. In disasters like Saturday’s earthquake, nothing but presence of mind can help you.

Nitya Nanda Sharma

Nepal Army, police and rescue teams working at this hour need equipment and detectors like those of the French team (82 hours, eSpecial). Commendable rescue effort.

Barsha

The disaster today will be growth tomorrow. Do not be discouraged.

Kunda Dixit

This week

Most shared on Facebook

“Langtang is gone” by Om Astha Rai (23,728 views)

Most popular on Twitter

Is the url for the government’s website to be raised by 20%? (3,766 tweets, 1,578 followers)

Most visited online page

“Langtang is gone” by Om Astha Rai (23,728 views)

Most commented

Day 3 update by Kunda Dixit (17 comments)

This is our weekly poll on the biggest problem facing Nepal. Which one do you think is the biggest problem facing Nepal today? If you think any other problem is the biggest, please mention it in the box below.

Most liked on Facebook

Coming out stronger from crisis by Arjun Khadka (49 likes)

Weekly Internet Poll #756

This week’s poll gives us a wide range of options: from government’s website being too expensive to the unemployment problem. What do you think is the biggest problem facing Nepal today?

Weekly Internet Poll #757

This week’s poll gives us a wide range of options: from government’s website being too expensive to the unemployment problem. What do you think is the biggest problem facing Nepal today?
O ver the last few days, a massive earthquake – followed by a series of ‘aftershocks’ – many of which were also extremely severe – have together killed probably as many as 6,000 people, injured possibly twice as many as that, buried whole villages and destroyed or severely damaged thousands of homes and public buildings across the hill areas of central Nepal, including the Kathmandu Valley.

Valley, in addition to generally older residential buildings, many centuries-old structures were destroyed, including some at UNESCO World Heritage sites. This series of earthquakes and aftershocks constitutes the most severe ‘natural’ disaster to strike Nepal since the 1934 Nepal-Bihar earthquake. Its effects were also felt across large areas of Tibet, North India and Bangladesh. When it came, it came as a surprise but geophysicists had warned for decades that Nepal was vulnerable to a deadly earthquake and Kathmandu is universally regarded as the city most likely to experience a major earthquake for many years.

In the last five years in particular, the numerous aid agencies in Kathmandu have been preparing programs, projects and protocols relating to ‘disaster preparedness’, which has become something of a mantra in the circle. DFID, Nepal, for example, last year approved a new, five-year Emergency Community Development Programme (ECDP) with a particular focus on strengthening the resilience of local communities.

The Government of Nepal has also attempted to draft new conventional wisdom regarding the priority to be accorded to ‘disaster preparedness’, particularly in the context of climate change, and has in recent years established its own institutions and procedures, from the national down to the local level. For example, the Prime Minister’s Disaster Fund was set up to receive donations and to allocate resources at a national level, while in each district there is now a Disaster Relief Committee which, together with the CDO and LDO, is supposed to respond to and coordinate responses to natural disasters in any given district.

However, despite all this talk of ‘disaster preparedness’ and some effort to educate the population at large in the need to ‘be prepared’, there is little indication that either the government or the foreign agencies on the spot in Kathmandu, or the hospitals and other emergency services, were in fact adequately prepared to meet the demands resulting from the earthquake and series of aftershocks in the crucial first days.

In all such disasters, the immediate priority is to provide adequate resources for the rescue of those buried under collapsed buildings and the treatment of injuries sustained in the disaster. It is evident from reports that the response provided by those government and non-government agencies on the spot in this initial crucial phase was inadequate. By contrast, the Indian Armed Forces, with the support of the government, swiftly initiated Operation Maitri (Operation Amity or Friendship), a humanitarian mission with the primary objective of conducting relief and rescue operations in Nepal. The Chinese government quickly sent a team to assist in the rescue and relief operations, and offers of assistance and pledges of funds were received from many other countries within a few days, including a generous $3 million by the government of Bhutan. Mint is not a problem, but effective action at this crucial phase has been.

Rescue operations were largely confined in the first 24 hours to the central area of Kathmandu and Patan and appear to have been mainly the result of the uncoordinated efforts by local people and some local service providers. In the first two days, information provided regarding the impact and implications of the disaster was heavily reliant on individuals posting reports and taking photographs of areas where destruction had been particularly severe; there was virtually no information of any kind, and certainly none on the situation in areas outside the Kathmandu Valley, provided by government sources or by any of the foreign aid agencies. Such reports tended to focus on Kathmandu and Everest Base Camp.

The hospitals and clinics in Kathmandu were clearly unprepared and effectively overwhelmed by the sudden demand for treatment from the many people injured; there were even private hospitals and clinics that turned people away, presumably because they could not pay – although the government did quickly intervene to oblige private hospitals to treat all patients in need. In part because of their unpreparedness and sudden massive demand, but also because any real ‘on the ground reporting’ from any of these areas, let alone any attempt to bring resources to bear to assist with local efforts at rescue and relief.

After the initial phase of rescue and treatment of injuries, the main concern in responses to disasters is usually to provide relief, usually in the form of shelter, blankets, drinking water, food and continuing medical treatment. It seems clear that the initial responses in most areas were simply those of the local population, feeling damaged and collapsing buildings or running for cover, working together to look after family members, friends and neighbours, or simply trying to save themselves, often camping out in the open for night after night. By days four and five there were indications that, in Kathmandu and in the other areas severely affected, there was growing anger at the apparent lack of government or other external support for largely local efforts to respond to the growing needs of a devastated population.

Within Nepal, the UNDP moved quite quickly into action to coordinate with government, but there was little indication that the government of Nepal was in a position to take the lead and it was not until several days after the initial earthquake that the Prime Minister signed a kind of public statement. A few politicians, notably Buhu Ram Bhattarai, were prepared to take action individually, but in general there has been a woeful lack of responsibility from those supposedly governing the country.

None of the many bilateral and multilateral aid agencies with a presence in Kathmandu were prepared practically for such a disaster by, for example, stockpiling the predictably required essential goods, such as blankets, tents, bottled drinking water, food supplies, medical equipment and medicines, sanitary towels etc. which they could make available immediately during the crucial initial rescue and relief phase.

Nor does it seem that they had made any preparations to have teams of appropriately trained technical personnel available for the inevitable rescue and relief. Indeed, it was the government emergency services and Army. There is little indication either that any of the numerous NGOs or NGOs based in Kathmandu, but with branches outside the Valley, have been initially in a position to provide immediate assistance, despite their awareness in principle of the importance of ‘disaster preparedness’.

There is no intention here of ‘blaming’ anyone – and it should be recognised that the efforts now being made by all parties are impressive – but it was a slow start, and there are serious questions to be asked as to why there was so little ‘disaster preparedness’ to respond effectively to the needs and demands of the Nepali people so terribly affected in those crucial first few days.

There is also a real need to monitor and to account openly for the flow of funds being donated for disaster relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction, something that will take many months and even years to achieve, under the best of circumstances. @pigreen

THE GADFLY
David Seddon

The response to this disaster has been relatively swift, compared with the response to many disasters in other countries on other occasions, at least in the Kathmandu Valley itself. But some questions that need to be asked as to why the government and other agencies in Nepal were not able to provide the kind of technical and material assistance that was urgently required across all the areas affected within the first crucial days after the initial shock.
Surviving trauma

Hello everyone, I hope you are all taking care of each other. Last Saturday’s earthquake has affected millions of Nepalis. Experiencing and dealing with the aftermath of a natural disaster is traumatising for many people. Witnessing loved ones lose their lives and their homes can cause severe and persistent posttraumatic stress and grief.

Aftershocks are common and they tend to bring back bad memories of the incident. Sometimes sights, sounds and sensations can remind people of the earthquake and cause mental distress. The lucky ones do survive without any physical injuries but may be mentally scared, and some may exhibit aggressive behaviour or be more withdrawn. It is important to pay attention to signs of trauma and provide support as needed. Families can help each other and if needed, they should reach out to mental health professionals.

Please send me more questions to: askanjanaanything@nepalitimes.com or @AnjyRajy

My 12-year old daughter is getting nightmares after the earthquake and keeps asking me if we will die after every tremor. I try to reassure her that we will all be fine and we will not die but even I am not sure. I keep hearing about there being more powerful earthquakes. How do I make sure that she is not traumatised for life? SBL

AR: I am so sorry that your daughter is having a very difficult time after the earthquake, but it is quite natural for children and adults to have such reactions after going through a very traumatic experience. In case of younger children, they can be more resilient than adults because they tend to be able to cope and recover more easily than adults after experiencing or witnessing extensive trauma. With sleeping outside and not having power, routine gets disrupted. Now that we have fewer aftershocks, it is important you go back to your regular routine as soon as possible to start getting used to your old way of life. Try talking to your daughter and explain it to her that you are now safe, but need to be careful as always. It is not necessary to tell young children every detail that you hear about potential earthquakes. There have been stories about what may happen. Earthquakes cannot be predicted. One important thing I would stress on is that children’s functioning and reactions do get influenced by the way the parents or adults react, as children look up to adults. Children tend to do best when parents remain or at least appear to remain calm and respond to the children’s questions. It is necessary to address these concerns of nightmares from an early stage so it does not deteriorate over time. Some local organisations are training volunteers in trauma related psychosocial training, so hopefully there will be enough resources and support available as it will be necessary after the dust of the earthquake settles. Good luck.

Anjana is a certified mental health rehabilitation technician and has four years of experience in adult mental health in Maine, USA.

Coming out stronger from crisis

Our mountains and temples have been pulverised, but Nepal will rise again.

I t started like just any other Saturday morning, we were busy preparing for a wedding to go to in the afternoon. But, as they say, ‘it takes an instant to change lifetime’ and at 11.56AM on 25 April that is exactly what happened. The geography of our history crumbled into a pile of dust. In early April, I had taken my overseas friend to all three Darbar Squares and she considered them the most beautiful urban landscapes she had ever seen. Little did we know that it would be the last time we would see them intact. All three historic palaces are now in ruins. Monuments, however, can be rebuilt. The priority now is to save lives – of the trapped, the wounded and the infirm sleeping in the rain and in the open. Could five minutes change so much? Yes, it changed the face of Nepal. But amidst all the news of deaths and destruction, there were also heart-warming stories of generosity, kindness, and altruism.

In horrifying times like this, people still have the innate capacity to overcome hardships and demonstrate a hidden strength to cope. People cope, families cope, communities cope and so do countries. Despite all its problems, Nepal and Nepalis are coping. Our mountains and temples has been pulverised, but Nepal will rise again, we will come out stronger from this crisis. It will take time, but we will get there.

The earthquake is a reminder of trauma and loss, and it is going to affect our future behaviour as individuals and as a nation. Not being able to meet one’s basic needs can affect anyone’s resources and coping skills. People can only tolerate that much, and to cope with the stress some survivors may be more likely to engage in delinquent or careless behaviour and substance abuse.

There will be an increasing number of survivors of the earthquake who will experience post-traumatic stress disorder and depression. Major natural calamities like this one cause widespread anxiety, even the slightest movement can remind individuals of the recent disaster create panic and fear.

Apart from dealing with the immediate grief of a relative or friend who died, there is also the shock and dread at having witnessed such a cataclysmic event. Some are wracked with guilt for having survived while a near and dear one perished, others will find it difficult to erase the memory from their minds. Children are more resilient and may not be as mentally affected as adults, and proof of that is the sight of children playing cricket in the shelters in Kathmandu these past few days, while their parents try to keep them out of the path of falling buildings.

Their level of trauma in children depends on the amount of fear and stress the parents or adults themselves exhibit. If parents show fear, the children are afraid. If the parents are stressed, the children are also tense.

Slightly older children and teenagers could be more affected by volunteers from their community. Seeing destruction at close hand makes a very powerful impact on the lives of young adults. Their lives are forever changed.

Children and adults may have nightmares and sleeping problems, and also have issues with relationships and coping abilities. As adults and parents, it is necessary to support each other. As for parents, be caring as possible, explain to the children what happened without the unnecessary details, and establish a routine as soon as possible and when needed ask for help. Make sure to take care of yourselves in the process. Embrace the emotions, as it is natural to be sad and afraid.

Once the dust settles, we will notice more mental and emotional distress and if left untreated, they can become a bigger problem later. Please meet with a medical or mental health professional if needed.

With support, we can help each other overcome the trauma of 25 April.

Anjana Rajbhander & AnjyRajy

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Times
1 - 7 MAY 2015 #756
Believe it, or not
Accurate and prompt information was a commodity in short supply in the aftermath of the earthquake

Tonight will be the sixth night out in the open in a field near our home for my family since the earthquake hit on 25 April. Although our neighbourhood in Ekantakuna did not suffer serious damage, families are refusing to sleep inside because they have heard rumours fanned by some Indian TV channels that a bigger, more disastrous quake will strike any day. Even government officials and police have fanned the panic by repeating this in public.

The absurd prediction that a 9 magnitude earthquake would occur at 6PM on Monday was shared widely on social networking sites, sending an already panicked crowd into a state of terror. Then came rumours that the city will soon face a famine, or that the moon had flipped.

During emergencies nothing matters more than the family’s safety. That will explain why even educated intellectuals were so quick to believe and spread these rumours despite knowing it is impossible for scientists to predict exactly when or where an earthquake will occur. Rational thinking and the use of logic takes a back seat when you are constantly warned of an approaching apocalypse.

Partly because of the rumours, hundreds of thousands of people-thronged Kalanki and Gongabu this week to flee the city. Cashing in on the widespread panic were bus owners and shopkeepers who fleeced customers for everything from water to waiwai. A bus driver paid Rs 500 for a jar of water, which costs only Rs 50 on other days, and he passed on that cost to his passengers who had to pay Rs 2,000 for a ticket to Hetauda that would normally cost Rs 600.

Social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, free messaging apps like Viber helped Nepalis abroad reconnect with families at home as phone lines went dead. My own family reached out to me on wechat, and so did relatives in Tibet, which was also affected badly by Saturday’s quake.

While these sites proved valuable for worried relatives to check up on the status of their families in Nepal, it also became a place for people to spread propagated news, rumours and to spread panic.

Most Nepalis still have not understood that most information shared on social media is unfiltered. There is no editor on Facebook or Twitter to check and verify the accuracy and authenticity of each post. The impression among Nepal’s five million or so Facebook users seems to be that the Internet is the most credible medium there is because it is the most modern form of communication.

This is precisely why a person who just shared a post about a five star hotel denying permission for shelter seekers to camp on its lawn will enthusiastically share another one five minutes later refuting it once that goes viral. Thankfully, the social web is also governed by the self-correcting phenomenon of the ‘wiki-effect’ where experts with expertise can quickly correct misinformation: which means false rumours on Twitter like that of a tiger escaping from Jawalakhel Zoo will be quickly corrected.

We also saw this week how rumours and gossip thrive when experts, those with authoritative information or the government, stay out of the information sphere in times of crisis. During the royal massacre in 2001, rumours spread fast and wild because the government was absent. When there was finally an official statement, people did not trust the information because the public had been lied to so often.

An absence of updates by the government fueled speculation and helped spread panic. Only days after the earthquake did Nepal Society for Earthquake Technology (NSET) update its website. The Ministry of Home Affairs bustied itself announcing the death toll from each district, but had no information about what relief material was needed and where. How could volunteers contribute, where were the shelters? Ministers did come out on radio, but the reach of FM has now been taken over by the reach of FB. Smartphones were spreading

y€tì Airlines
You can fly

Yetti Airlines and Tara Air have been conducting their CSR through the Yetti Foundation Fund for nearly a decade. Looking at the present crisis in our country, Yetti Group of companies have decided to donate NPR 4 million to the Yetti Foundation Fund. The fund will be utilized for the rescue, medical help and support for the victim and needy.

All Yetti Group staff have also committed to contribute their one day salary to this fund. Furthermore, Yetti Air and Tara Air have been assisting wherever possible to transport evacuee and rescue back to Kathmandu.

We would like to inform you that Yetti Airlines and Tara Air have already presented a total financial assistance of over NPR 20 million to various social organisations who are undertaking relief work during this crisis.

Interested person who wish to join the cause can donate in the following details.

At this moment, every little contribution can make a big difference. If you would like to be a donor or contribute in any way please visit www.yetti.foundation

You are constantly warned of an approaching apocalypse.

The lack of information not only delayed rescue and relief where it was needed most, but demoralised eager volunteers, and led to concentration of help in few areas and duplication of relief. In the absence of direction from the government locals took it upon themselves to find out where and what kind of help was needed.

Bibeksheel Nepali, a youth group, set up a help desk at the airport after reading about rescue workers being stranded there. Another group of young people from Jhumki is helping distribute relief packages to locals at Harsiddhi. Others have gone to Khokana, where there has been no government help. Hundreds of volunteers have been participating at clean-up campaigns of Tundikhel and BICC, which together shelter more than 500 families.

These are all commendable efforts. One can’t help but imagine how much more help would have reached the right people had the information been available more readily. We have help, but not enough of the right kind of information.

The outside world got its visuals from parachute journalists who descended upon Kathmandu. The images they sent out only showed the ruins of the Darbar Squares and surrounding areas. No one took pictures of the 85 per cent of residences still standing in the capital. The media highlights the loss of cultural heritage. It will also organise auctions, sales of art and local events.

info@thecitymuseum.org
**GIVING TO THE LIVING**

**FUNDING**

- Satyta: is helping raise funds for earthquake survivors in Lamjung and Gorkha, where entire villages have been leveled.
  [sathyta.org]
- UNICEF: is raising money for the 1.7m children who are in urgent need of aid in the areas worst hit by the earthquake.
  [www.supposeofnepal.org]
- Childreach: is raising money to help villages of Sindupalchok and Manakharpan.
  [www.childreach.org/nepal]
- Possible: works with America Nepal Medical Foundation to raise funds for the Nepal earthquake relief efforts.
  [www.possible.org]
- A crowd funding project to raise fund for the rebuilding of Sanuki, where 90% per cent of buildings have reportedly been damaged.
  [www.crowdfunder.co.uk/rebuild-sanuki]
- Maya, directed by Veemsen Lama, has a click.
  [www.mayafilm.com]
- NepalEarthquakeReliefVolunteers Facebook group with information on volunteering in Gorkha.
  [www.facebook.com/nepalearthquakerecoveryvolunteers]
- A day-by-day overview of the earthquake's aftermath.
  [www.humanrainsponse.org/ein/operations/nepal/]
- Facebook group with information on on-going volunteer efforts and rescue operations.
  [www.facebook.com/nepal earthquake relief volunteers]
- An online platform to help share information and coordiantes.
  [www.kaha.co]

**RESCUE AND RECOVERY**

- An online volunteering community.
  [www.volunteer.org]
- DISASTER: lists organisations through which donations can be sent.
  [www.usaid.gov/nepal- earthquake]
- UNICEF teams have started to provide immediate health services.
  [www.unicef.org]
- A day-by-day overview of the earthquake’s aftermath.
  [www.humanrainsponse.org/ein/operations/nepal/]
- NepalEarthquakeReliefVolunteers Facebook group with information on on-going volunteer efforts and rescue operations.
  [www.facebook.com/nepal earthquake relief volunteers]
- Food and water, distributed by local organizations.
  [www.youcaring.com]
- Waste disposal, first dumping site is in operation since 30 April, for sanitation related issues within Kathmandu.
  [www.kaha.co]

**HEALTH AND SANITATION**

- Water filtration system that can purify up to 1,500 litres of water per hour and remove germs up to 1 microns. Ahmad and his five-member team arrived on Monday and has already deployed the system at the Amanspurpa Hotel and through volunteers in distributing water through two tankers to shelters in Kathmandu Valley.
- The Corporate Citizen Foundation was set up by Singapore-based companies after the Asian tsunami to respond to disasters in the region. Its strategic partners include Pacific Flights Services for rapid air mobility, Golden Season which makes the water filtration system, Thomson Medical for medicines, HSL Constructor for infrastructure and Access to Markets for communications.
- The Aquatic Foundation is helping raise funds for earthquake survivors in Lamjung and Gorkha, where entire villages have been leveled.
  [www.corporatecitizen.org]

**RESOURCES**

- Food and water, distributed by local organizations.
  [www.youcaring.com]
- Whisk know how to order dial ‘111’ for free, toll-free, minute-to-minute updates.
  [www.111.np]

**VOLUNTEER WITH YOUR SKILLS**

- A day-by-day overview of the earthquake’s aftermath.
  [www.humanrainsponse.org/ein/operations/nepal/]
- Facebook group with information on on-going volunteer efforts and rescue operations.
  [www.facebook.com/nepal earthquake relief volunteers]
- A day-by-day overview of the earthquake’s aftermath.
  [www.humanrainsponse.org/ein/operations/nepal/]
- Facebook group with information on on-going volunteer efforts and rescue operations.
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- Food and water, distributed by local organizations.
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  [www.kaha.co]
KUNDA DIXIT

I had been an avid reader of the daily newspapers and had always been fascinated by the tales of earthquakes. The recent one, however, had been more than just another story. The city of Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal, was hit by a 7.8-magnitude earthquake on Saturday, April 25, 2015. The tremor was felt throughout the city, including in my home town of Bhaktapur, which is located about 20 kilometers north of Kathmandu.

As we were descending along the ridge, about two hours’ walk from the city, we noticed through our binoculars that the sky was overcast, and we were definitely not looking forward to the weather. The lines were down.

As we were on a hill overlooking the city, the view was stunning. The mountains to the north were still visible, and the Himalayas were clearly visible in the distance. We could barely stay standing. “This is the Big One,” I thought.

Kathmandu is first on the list of cities deemed most vulnerable to seismic risk in the world. Every year in mid-January, Nepal marks National Earthquake Safety Day to commemorate the massive earthquake that flattened Kathmandu in 1934. The city is still recovering from that disaster.

As we were descending along the ridge, about two hours’ walk from the city, we noticed through our binoculars that the sky was overcast, and we were definitely not looking forward to the weather. The lines were down.

The earthquake from above

Puffs, then billows, of dust rose from various parts of the city, within minutes shrouding the whole valley in a brown blanket. The historic town of Bhaktapur, at the eastern edge, looked like it was being swallowed by a sand storm. Kathmandu disappeared.

By late Saturday afternoon, it was clear that this was going to be quite as devastating as feared. A few members of our group had managed to contact their relatives. But four of us had not, and we hurried back. We retrieved my car parked at the foot of the hill, and headed into town. On the road we had to skirt fallen masonry and tilted buildings. People were sitting clustered in open spaces or in the middle of the streets, as far as possible from anything that might collapse. In front of a hospital, we saw patients lying on mattresses set out on the sidewalk.

The lines were down. An hour later, as we were still walking downhill, there was another tremor. I felt like I was being yanked forward a couple of meters. The whole mountain seemed to lurch. There were more dust clouds. After those cleared, we noticed through our binoculars that most of the residential areas of the city seemed intact. That brought us some measure of relief. A few members of our group had managed to contact their relatives. But four of us had not, and we hurried back. We retrieved my car parked at the foot of the hill, and headed into town. On the road we had to skirt fallen masonry and tilted buildings. People were sitting clustered in open spaces or in the middle of the streets, as far as possible from anything that might collapse. In front of a hospital, we saw patients lying on mattresses set out on the sidewalk. By late Saturday afternoon, it started becoming clear that there was no damage in Kathmandu; the casualties were high and the damage was serious, notably at various World Heritage sites, the quake’s effects might not be quite as devastating as feared.

My own family was safe, though my bed-ridden mother had to be moved to the hospital. My family and I slept in a tent in our backyard. It has now been more than 24 hours since the first quake, and by my count we have spent more than 48 hours in tents and shelters as well as for rescue flights. A warehouse near my home has collapsed, and its makka通り is now a temporary camp for the survivors.

The weather becomes the least of our problems when there is a catastrophic as massive as the earthquake that hit the country on 25 April. However, the aftereffects of the earthquake have been devastating. The entire country was in shock. The capital city of Kathmandu, which had been once bustling with life, was now a ghost town. The streets were empty, and the buildings were in ruins.

Any government in the world would have been overwhelmed by the scale of this disaster, but the logistical difficulties in Nepal, a poor, near-roadless, mountainous land, are extraordinary. The country’s only international airport was unusable. The country’s main hospital in Kathmandu was destroyed.

As we were descending along the ridge, about two hours’ walk from the city, we noticed through our binoculars that the sky was overcast, and we were definitely not looking forward to the weather. The lines were down.

Bikram Rai
The bad news is that much of Kathmandu Valley’s historic core was reduced to rubble in the 25 April earthquake. The good news is that the temples and palaces have frequently been destroyed every 100 years or so, and they have always been rebuilt. Many of the historic temples, rest houses and ancient palace complexes that came down on Saturday were also destroyed in the 1934 earthquake, and hastily rebuilt. Some were restored in their original architecture style, others with Newari-style roofs were converted into stucco Moghul domes, and some were simply reinforced.

Fortunately, these temples have been documented and can be rebuilt to their pre-1934 splendour based on period photographs. Five days after the quake, it is apparent that many monuments in Bhaktapur, Patan, Kathmandu, Kirtipur, Bungamati, Khokana and Sankhu have been destroyed. Bhesh Dahal, Director General of the Department of Archaeology, says a total of 57 monuments of the Kathmandu Valley have been destroyed. “Our team is currently on the field to make the deeper inventories,” he told Nepali Times.

Many of the edifices that were rebuilt and restored in the past 20 years have remained intact. The Patan Museum courtyard, parts of the Hanuman Dhoka Complex, restored temples and the ‘floating’ Taleju Temple in Patan remained largely uncathed. The Nyatapola Temple in Bhaktapur and Patan’s Krishna Mandir survived 1934, and 2015 as well.

However, as Rohit Ranjitkar of Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT), points out, there were exceptions. “Our first restoration project was Swota’s Rada Krishna Temple but that came down like a house of cards on Saturday,” he said.

During a meeting in Patan last Tuesday, KVPT decided to study the technical mistakes while restoring the old temples. “Theory is vague, we have to learn from real life,” Ranjitkar told us.

KVPT, has also tried to collect all the artefacts from the damaged monuments before they are stolen or damaged further. Volunteers have been collecting carved wooden columns and eaves, stone and bronze figures of deities and putting them inside the Patan Museum courtyard for safekeeping. In Bhaktapur, the community is involved in protecting the ruins, and making an inventory of the damaged monuments.

Ranjitkar says Kathmandu’s kings restored the city after every earthquake through their own resource, and there is no reason why we can’t do that again. “It would be good if we did the restoration ourselves but, frankly, at this point I don’t mind where the money comes from.”

The board members of KVPT in New York are preparing to raise funds, and some donors are already said to be interested in chipping in. But more than money, the real challenge is that the restoration is accurate and conforms as much as possible to the original.

“Some will want to rebuild new temples in concrete since our living culture is more about the resident god rather than the temple’s architecture,” Ranjitkar explained.

But this might cause the loss of Nepal’s soul. It is thus legitimate to ask: can we preserve the essence of our heritage and make it more resistant to future earthquakes?

“It is important to examine the collapsed monuments and learn why some withstood multiple earthquakes while others keep falling down,” Ranjitkar said. This process and the reconstruction could take up to seven years, and experts being faithful to the original is more important than the time it takes. It is reasonable to question whether rebuilding monuments is a priority at a time when the death toll has been so high, so many people are still trapped under collapsed buildings and relief supplies have not reached survivors.

“If there is no people, what is the use of heritage?” asked Ranjitkar. “Those alive will always be able to restore the monuments.”
TEMPLES OF DOOM: (Clockwise from left) Krishna Mandir is one of the few temples still standing in Patan Darbar Square.

The statue of King Yognarendra Malla which was knocked off its pedestal in the Patan Museum courtyard for safekeeping.

Priceless carved wooden columns lie amidst the ruins.

What remains of the Radha Krishna Temple in Patan.

Location of temples and historical sites destroyed on 25 April.
It was a typical Saturday for eight-year-old Nikesh Maharjan, who was playing in his room when his mother came calling for him. The next thing he knew, the floor below him caved in.

The earthquake that hit Kathmandu that morning caused his home in Khapinche of Patan to collapse on itself. When he finally emerged from the rubble a few hours later, he found out that half of his family had perished.

His older brother Rupesh, his mother, Nirmala Maharjan, himself and his elderly grandfather were the only members left in his original family of eight. The young boy lost his father, uncle, aunt and a seven-month-old niece.

Nirmala Maharjan was still in shock two days after the quake happened. “I want to talk but it is still very difficult for me to do so,” she told us, her face swollen from weeping.

“There was an earthquake. My house collapsed. I got wounds on my face and shoulders, and it hurts,” young Nikesh recounted. His mother also suffered cuts on her face and bruises to her body.

Nikesh is now living in a cramped temporary shelter with his mother and brother in the same neighbourhood, where water and food supplies are running low. The shelter currently houses more than 100 locals seeking refuge from the continuous aftershocks.

At least a dozen houses in the Khapinche, Chikanbaili and Tunchigali areas of Chyasal in Patan collapsed, as did many temples in the historic Darbar Square in Mangal Bazaar.

Juju Kaji Awale lost four family members when his house in Tunchigali collapsed during the quake. He lost his wife while his younger brother Rakesh Awale lost his whole family, wife and two children. They cremated their deceased family members in Bholdhoka along the Bagmati. Juju Kaji was too distraught to speak. Like many, he does not have insurance for his house and remains stranded in nearby shelters.

Shiva Shrestha, originally from Chitlang lost his wife and his young children. They were running a roadside eatery, which they had bought just two months ago in Chyasal. The building collapsed along with two other nearby houses.

A customer from Ramparp and a pedestrian who happened to be walking nearby, Ramsh Maharjan, was buried in the ruins. Shrestha’s wife was also trapped under the same rubble for six hours.

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The avalanche of ice and rocks fell on the village of Langtang just after the ground started shaking on 25 April. Even before the family of Dawa Tamang could run for safety the debris had engulfed them.

Tamang, 35, has a dazed look on his face at the courtyard of Kathmandu Medical College (KMC) where his family was evacuated by helicopter on Monday. Tamang himself was in Kathmandu with his elder son when the earthquake struck.

Doctors examined his two-and-half year old son Thindup who broke both his legs while the family tried to escape from their house. His five-year-old daughter Pasang Lhamu escaped with minor injuries. His wife Karsom, 32, sits nearby with an injured arm.

The Tamang family was one of the lucky ones. Nearly all the 200 inhabitants of this tiny village at the base of Mt Langtang perished under a mountain of boulders and ice. The Tamangs only got out because a trekker chartered a helicopter and evacuated them to Kathmandu.

“The entire village is gone, our house is gone, where can I go once this is over?” asks Tamang whose son will have to be operated in a few days. He says his family was lucky to have a benefactor who brought them out, there was no presence of the government in Langtang.

Next to Tamang in a makeshift bed is Chunchok Tamang, 29, paralysed from the waist down after a rock hit her. Her one-year-old

**Microcosm of a calamity**

**CYNTHIA CHOO and SONIA AWALE**

“Langtang is gone”

**SAHINA SHRESTHA**

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I n a small alley in Gongabu bus park are a row of guest houses that usually accommodate Nepali migrant workers on their way to or from their home districts.

Today, the guest houses are all leaning on each other, with broken windows, cracks and gaping holes where their walls used to be. On the road, amidst piles of broken bricks and a strong stench of rotting bodies, are abandoned flip-flops, shards of glass, wires. At the end of the alley, a seven-storey house has pancaked into two. Many of the bodies have been removed. But a man has just been found inside, he is still alive.

Twenty eight-year-old Rishi Khanal of Argakhanchi was pulled out alive from the guest house on Tuesday night after staying trapped underneath a fallen beam for 82 hours. A French rescue team and the Armed Police Force (APF) worked relentlessly for more than ten hours on Tuesday to pull Khanal out safely. The French team had brought special detectors to find out if anyone was still alive, and Khanal was barely breathing, his leg trapped under a broken concrete beam. By Wednesday, the French search and rescue team had pulled out 14 people alive from destroyed buildings in Kathmandu.

“‘We started drilling a hole through the concrete according to the French team’s instructions, then they brought special equipment to cut the beam his leg was stuck under, only to find out his other leg was also caught on something. After cutting the ply, we were finally able to rescue him alive,’ said Narayan Thapa of APF. ‘After finding out that Khanal was still alive a medical team went in to supply him with water and oxygen through a special tube.’

Rescuers had initially said there was one other person alive underneath the rubble, but he died before they could reach him. ‘We had hoped Rishi would make it out alive, since he was talking to us and giving us his name and address,’ said Kapindra Thapa of the APF, ‘and he did.’

Sohina Shrestha

82 HOURS

W hen we met Rabita Kushwaha four months ago in Sanga Chok of Sindhupalchok, she excitedly showed us around the school (picture, below) that she had been assigned to by Teach for Nepal, the campaign to bring young motivated Nepali youth to volunteer in rural schools.

Her students were all bright and smiling, and looked up to Kushwaha not just as a teacher, but as a friend and mentor. Many of those students died on Saturday when the earthquake destroyed the building they were in.

Sindhupalchok was 120km from the epicentre of the quake, but the district northeast of Kathmandu bore the brunt of the casualties with at least 1,500 deaths so far. The real figure may be double of that.

Another Teach for Nepal fellow, Jigme Sherpa, who worked at the Jana Vikas Secondary School was trying to rescue students from the rubble when he received the news that one of his fellow teachers was killed in a falling building. ‘I was devastated by the sight of my friend’s body under the rubble, I cannot believe that he is gone,’ Sherpa said. ‘Several of Sherpa’s and Kushwaha’s students were also killed.

Kushwaha teaches at the Nawalpur Secondary School, and said the earthquake flattened the entire village. ‘Everything is gone, there is nothing left,’ she told us.

Teach for Nepal’s founder Shirist Khanal said there had not been any organised rescue and relief. ‘It is very urgent that we get help into Sindhupalchok,’ he said.

Teach for Nepal’s other fellows are now headed to Sindhupalchok, not to teach, but to rescue and provide relief. Teach for Nepal has launched a ‘Rebuild Our Communities’ campaign to help in at least 100 areas where it works.

Sherpa is determined to go back as soon as he can, and has been posting messages on Facebook, calling for volunteers. He said: ‘I don’t want to go back empty-handed. My village needs me.’

Kushwaha told us: ‘There is nothing I can do except be strong myself. I have to be.’

Cynthia Choo

www.teachfornepal.org

nepalitimes.com

Teacher’s tragedy

Teacher’s tragedy

Teacher’s tragedy

Teacher’s tragedy
It is hard to write about the arts, much less a ‘fun’ film review in times when one has just felt the ground shake between your feet in such a manner that it would seem the earth might break apart.

All around us, things are broken, people are traumatised and suffering, mentally and physically: sleeping under the rain, and in a lot of cases, wanting of even basic first aid and supplies.

Perhaps the only film that I have seen that comes close to really portraying the horrific, visceral reality of natural disasters is *The Impossible* (2012) a film about the tragic Indian Ocean tsunami, triggered by a M 9.2 (approximate) earthquake in 2004 that took 280,000 thousand lives and affected Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, Singapore, and the Maldives.

For people who choose to see it, be warned, it may be a Hollywood film starring Naomi Watts, as a tough as nails mother, struggling against the elements to save her family, but it is hard to bear. For those of us who have now been through such life altering events, the film drives home one stark point, when earthquakes, or tsunamis, or floods, avalanches, and landslides hit, there is really nothing we can do aside from hold on tight and pray, even if you are a non-believer, that your lucky stars are out that day; natural disasters are strangely democratic in that way. They do not differentiate about where they hit, although, it must be said that it is always the poorest people who receive aid last, and are most affected, simply due to lack of access to facilities that the more affluent can get to much faster.

The other lesson that can be learnt from this film is that of basic humanity asserting itself, or not, during natural disasters. The real life story of Maria Belon (Watts) is one of luck, and a great deal of benevolence on the part of the Thai people, who in the midst of being severely affected themselves, helped people who were in need sometimes above, beyond, and despite, their own immediate woes.

We are in that moment of time where we will be judged (and judge ourselves) by how we act when people are in desperate need. I cannot urge you more to reach out to whoever you can, even if it is just in your neighbourhood, and provide what you are able to. Be it food, water, moral support. It is necessary, it is possible, it is in your hands.
In the aftermath of Saturday’s powerful earthquake which rattled central Nepal, a global volunteer initiative is working together to map physical infrastructure in affected areas to coordinate rescue and relief operations. Kathmandu Living Labs (KLL), in coordination with the Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team (HOTOSM), Mapbox Bangalore, Nepal Monitor and Parewa Labs, have brought together over 2,500 mappers globally to contribute to the OpenStreetMap platform to aid relief agencies and volunteers to plan and target their relief efforts.

“Kathmandu Living Labs is creating a central repository for geo-located needs data, which is being used for relief efforts,” says Prabhas Pokharel of KLL. The mapping was activated for Nepal the same day as the earthquake and was fully operational from Sunday, 26 April. “As soon as the 5am aftershock on Sunday, our KLL team was in touch with each other. Thanks to solar inverter and ADSL, we immediately began strategising what we could do best to impact and coordinate the situation,” adds Pokharel.

Users are allowed to submit reports to the crowd-sourced platform based on the following categories: damage caused by the earthquake, people trapped, blocked roads, help wanted, shelter area and distribution area. Tags can be added onto the map, allowing users to identify areas that need help and to decide what kind of aid is needed. Larger the size of the tags, the greater the number of reports submitted by users.

“Within two days of launching the platform, we have had a lot of reports coming into the site. But the challenge is to effectively connect that information to the people involved in the rescue and relief work,” says KLL’s Nama Budathoki.

The platform serves as a comprehensive database of pertinent issues related to the earthquake, and is supported with location details, contact information, additional photographs as well as videos. Users are able to identify issues that need to be acted upon and those that have already been resolved. KLL have also been working on distributing maps extracted from OpenStreetMap data to aid in earthquake mapping. Most of these maps are focused on the 11 most affected districts, including Sindhupalchok, Gorkha and Ramechhap. “These maps actually make efforts of the massive online volunteering useful to teams on the ground by providing them access to offline maps on smartphones as well as paper maps,” Pokharel adds. The mappers are vectorising satellite imagery before and after the earthquake to identify roads, tracks and buildings in areas affected by the earthquake. They have mapped 13,199 new miles of roads and 110,681 new buildings. Much of the mapping is coordinated online and is updated every 30 minutes.

KLL works with agencies such as National Society for Earthquake Technology (NSET), the Nepal Red Cross and Bibeksheel Nepali youth-based political party as well as directly coordinating with civilians to collate the date.

While post-disaster satellite imagery are available for certain parts of Kathmandu Valley, it has been challenging to receive imagery of more remote locations.

Similarly, Google’s crisis team is crowdsourcing information to work on getting high definition satellite scans of heavily damaged areas, with priority over inaccessible regions. However, the work is still ongoing as it is looking for assistance to obtain names of villages or co-ordinates on Google Maps.

ICIMOD is also working with the Government of Nepal by providing its expertise in GIS and remote sensing to support the relief efforts. The Kathmandu-based mountain research institute is working with other stakeholders and space agencies to monitor other hazards triggered by the earthquake such as landslides and bursting of glacial lakes.

To use the platform, visit quakemap.org.

For maps of 11 most affected districts, visit bit.ly/nepalmaps
Sonit's mother looks on, distraught.

Sonit is found alive after 22 hours under the rubble.

Sonit is unhurt.

Soldiers dig under the rubble to rescue Sonit.

For more photos of the rescue, see Kathmandu Today

Anyone who has visited Barpak village of Gorkha district has this image of a picturesque hamlet of identical houses, cobble stone streets, a micro-hydropower plant supplying round-the-clock electricity and home-stay facilities for tourists.

The total picture village perched on a slope in Gorkha district was completely destroyed in last week’s earthquake. Only 50 of the 1,400 houses survived intact. The displaced families have been living in makeshift tents, braving rain and cold weather.

“Two or three houses that still stand are not habitable,” said local resident, Om Bahadur Chalise. “About 65 bodies had been pulled out from the rubble till Tuesday, but Chalise says there might be many more.

“There was a big jolt and our houses crumbled straight on the spot,” Chalise added. “Within seconds we lost our families, houses, schools, and health posts.”

If that wasn’t bad enough a fire then started and gutted 15 houses, killing four more people.

Eight macabre workers were killed when an building under construction collapsed.

Despite its remoteness, Barpak is not poor. Its industrious inhabitants have prospered from eco-tourism and cottage industries. The village had schools, police office, post office, agriculture office and health post – all of them now destroyed.

The only way rescue teams can reach Barpak is by a helicopter, and Indian and Nepali choppers airlifted 65 injured people to the Valley where they were flown onto the nearest health post – all of them now destroyed.

But many houses, offices and apartments do not meet the minimum safety criteria. Even when a 6.8 magnitude shock Udayapur 204km away in 1990, buildings in Bhaktapur collapsed killing 125. Despite all this, last week’s quake had a lower casualty rate than expected in Kathmandu.

One reason could be that it was Saturday, so schools and government offices were closed. The group NEST had predicted that an earthquake like 1934 would kill up to 43,000 students and teachers if it happened during school hours.

In 1934, Kathmandu Valley’s population was 256,000, today it is nearly 3 million and we live in densely-packed neighbourhoods and buildings not constructed to withstand strong earthquakes. There is no real disaster preparedness plan, or a coordinated approach to post-earthquake search, rescue and relief.

There is little attention to ensuring water supply and food, or managing epidemics in shelters. And even after four days, the government was not able to distribute enough tents in the capital. Specialised expertise in digging people from collapsed concrete structures are not adequate.

A cover story in Himal Khabarpatrika (pictured, left) four years ago to mark National Earthquake Safety Day predicted that a big earthquake could happen any day and it listed what needed to be done to ensure better preparedness:

- food and water stockpiles, pre-positioning first aid, emergency and digging equipment, family and community contingency plans.

We can be thankful that the quake this time was not as destructive as predicted, even though the loss of life was great.

Not-so-big One

Dambir Krishna Shrestha in himalkhabar.com, 28 April

Seismologists have been warning us about a Big One in Kathmandu for quite some time. Our mountains were formed by the collision of the Indian and Tibetan plates, and they are still rising. The Indian plate is moving north at 5cm a year and this tectonic tension is released periodically, triggering major earthquakes. The worst case scenario in case of a 8 magnitude earthquake are truly frightening.

Kathmandu Valley alone would see 100,000 killed outright, 200,000 wounded and 1.5 million homeless. Homes, offices, schools, hospitals would all be damaged, as well as roads and bridges. There would be no electricity and drinking water, telephone lines would also be blocked.

As it turned out, a 7.9 earthquake caused huge loss of life and loss for the nation, but there was much less damage than expected in Kathmandu.

As we go to press, the death toll has crossed 5,000 and is expected to at least double.

The important World Heritage sites of the Valley have been destroyed. Many villages in Gorkha to Sindhupalchok have been reduced to rubble.

Surviving Dharara

Shobha Sharma on Setopati, 29 April

On the fifth floor of the National Trauma Center, 17-year-old Ramila Shrestha (above, right) and her friend Sanjeev Shrestha (above, left) lie next to each other in the same ward. Ramila has a fractured leg and Sanjeev with a fractured arm. Both of them, survivors of the 7.8 magnitude earthquake that hit central Nepal completely demolishing Dharara.

Ramila came to Kathmandu two months ago from Barpak to help her father Deepak Shrestha with his shop in Kirtipur. Sanjeev, a native of Bhimpokhari, was living with his sister-in-law at Basantapur. Ever since reading about Dharara in school, Ramila had wanted to climb the country’s tallest tower.

So, on Saturday the two set out to enjoy a bird’s eye view of Kathmandu before going to the movies at Guna Cinema.

Excited about her first visit, Ramila walked ahead of her friend while stopping to look out the circular windows along the stairs. The two had just stepped out into the balcony when the tower started tottering. From the ground people started shouting “earthquake”. Ramila remembers Sanjeev sitting down while she held on tightly to the railing as the structure came crashing down. Next thing she remembers was being flat on the rubble with her friend a little further away. The railing she had held on to crushed a mother and her daughter.

“If I hadn’t been thrown off, I would have been dead too,” says Ramila who was rescued by a policeman. Sanjeev came to in hospital and woke up next to Ramila.
When the earth started shaking on Saturday just before noon, the family of the Living goddess of Patan had just finished their meal and were sitting together. When the first jolt came, like all other residents of the city, the family started screaming and wanted to run out in panic.

But the 7-year-old Living Goddess, Yunika Bajracharya (pic), who was sitting on her ceremonial altar, told them to calm down and not to rush out of the building.

“She had her eyes closed as if she was in a trance, and she told us nothing would happen to us,” the goddess’ father Ramesh Bajracharya recalled.

The floor of the house rocked violently, the house rattled loudly and the family huddled together, and prayed for protection. When the tremors stopped, Ramesh Bajracharya lit the votive lamps and joined his daughter, the Goddess, in meditation and prayer.

“We knew that if the Kumari Majhu told us nothing would happen to us, nothing would happen to us,” Ramesh Bajracharya told us, “and indeed we were all safe in that room because of her faith.”

When the aftershocks came, the family was worried even less because they felt the worse was over. “If the big earthquake couldn’t destroy the building, we were confident that the smaller aftershocks would not harm us at all.”

Indeed, while other temples and buildings on Mahapal Street of Patan came crashing down during the quake, the Kumari Temple did not even lose a tile from its roof. Similarly, while four major temples in Kathmandu Darbar Square were razed to the ground, the temple of the Kathmandu Kumari also survived completely unscathed.

The families of the previous Kumaris who also reside in the courtyard did not run away to safer places. “If the reigning Kumari assured us about our safety, we knew that we would not be hurt,” said the mother of a previous Kumari.

On Wednesday, I went to offer my thanks to the Kumari for my own close escape when I got nearly thrown off my balcony during the shaking. When the earthquake struck, I had grabbed my camera, turned off the gas and ran down with my wife and son to Macchendra Bahal. When we came back, we saw that the balcony where I was a moment ago was swaying precariously.

Min Ratna Bajracharya

The Living Goddess lives through the quake