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# HOMELESS IN NEPAL

The challenge now is to provide both short-term shelter and long-term housing, mainly in rural areas but also in ravaged urban centres

The numbers are staggering: 600,000 homes destroyed, 20,000 schools in ruins, government buildings reduced to rubble, dozens of bazar towns that look like they are carpet bombed. And that was before Tuesday’s 7.3 aftershock which finished off the houses that were left. No one has even bothered to revise the figures.

As logistical hurdles and bureaucratic delays overcome to get more emergency shelter, medicine and food to the affected areas, attention has started turning to the enormous task of rehabilitation and reconstruction. As we report in this edition of *Nepali Times*, there is the urgent need for short-term emergency shelter so families can tide over the approaching monsoon and winter. Then there is the longer-term need for massive reconstruction which could be financed by remittances, government grants, subsidies and soft loans – all with the intention of creating jobs at home to stem the expected exodus of even more Nepalis going abroad to work (See Om Astha Rai’s report on page 16).

Short-term shelter requires coordination between government and agencies like UN-HABITAT as well as smaller relief groups in order to quickly cover the sheer geographical scale of the affected area. It is important that these temporary shelters not become permanent homes, and that people are given the financial means and technical assistance necessary to rebuild in the longer-term.

Future reconstruction of the devastated Kathmandu Valley towns, urban centres and district headquarters will need a different kind of focus: how to brace ‘non-engineered’ unreinforced masonry buildings. There is no strict code for these kinds of houses, but there are ‘rules of thumb’ that



that reinforced concrete construction demand that rules about preparing and using cement are strictly followed.

So, like everything else in Nepal, it comes down to implementation. The 1993 building code needs to be updated and enforced, masons must be trained in reinforcing brick and their work monitored, safer and cheaper designs need propagation. There many alternative housing solutions (some of which we have listed on page 15) but the trouble with alternatives is that they are difficult to scale-up to a national level and be accepted by the mainstream. The lesson from Haiti is not to have grandiose and expensive government housing projects. Efforts by individual families to rebuild on their own should not be derailed, and government must not be bypassed. However, the state must be put on notice that it can’t botch reconstruction assistance like it messed up the distribution of compensation for conflict victims in which many genuine families never got help.

Most rural rebuilding will have to be (and should be) household-led under benign but vigilant state regulation. The role of local government in the districts should be to provide financial support, enforce technical standards, monitor reconstruction without actually building homes. Proposed housing types should be specific to each community and use existing local materials and skills. A lot of this is already starting to happen, and much of the reconstruction will by default use local materials. However, many will opt for reinforced concrete which needs training and oversight. Unless locals have a sense of ownership (of both private houses and civic buildings like schools) the new construction will not be maintained and looked after.

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### MARSHALL PLAN

I hope the remaining natural forests will not be destroyed or degraded during the reconstruction process ('Needed: A Marshall Plan', Editorial, #757). Reconstruction must be planned prudently with environmental sustainability and efficiency in mind, and without adversely impacting the ecology. This is an opportunity to make things right from the word 'go', and I hope politicians, government officials, planners, citizens, and the donor community will behave rationally and with farsightedness.

**ANepali**

■ Fire Bam Dev Gautam. The man has no experience in disaster management, people died due to his ineptness.

**Gopal**

■ This editorial is spot on, but can be summarised in one sentence: 'Incompetence is a general state and non-specific.' Why assume that a government incompetent at education, health care and constitution writing would suddenly display competence in disaster management?

**Socrates**

■ We should take this earthquake as an opportunity to think ahead

and find new ways to face challenges surrounding us.

**Ketan Dulal**

■ Disaster is an understatement. Has the current government got the mandate to govern Nepal? I think with this situation they are way over their heads. How much bigger wake up call does Nepali public need?

**Samyuk Shrestha**

■ This is exactly right. Incompetence is a general state of being, and those in politics in Nepal are completely and utterly incompetent. Not fit for purpose whether that purpose relates to disaster management, healthcare, power supply, job creation, education, infrastructure, the economy. They operate a completely 'extractive system' and until they are completely removed and replaced Nepal will remain one of the poorest and least developed countries. The tragedy of this is that the country is full of resilient, hard working, caring people but who seem content to be led over the cliff time after time.

**Brian Metters**

■ Thanks for this well-articulated masterpiece of an editorial, and an inspiring note to the youth to return and participate in rebuilding their nation. By then, the senile beings

squatting on the high seats will remove themselves and go on a pilgrimage.

**Kesang**

■ Our governments did not work for the good of all in the past. It does not at present. And I see no chances of it working for all in future. They should put one of those red dangerous building tags on Baluwatar and Singha Darbar -- they should be condemned. We don't need a plan like a Marshall Plan, we need implementation of the plans we have.

**Narendra Tamang**

■ Excellent editorial. However, in Nepal right now I don't see a leader who can handle a Marshall Plan type of work.

**Netra Thapa**

**SINDHUPALCHOK'S SORROW**  
Lack of efficient access to aid, combined with little political transparency or information can make things spiral out of control ('Sindhupalchok's sorrow', Bhrikuti Rai, #757). These local communities do matter.

**Kristine Hildebrandt**

■ Most of the time, our leaders are busy enjoying sekuwa, drinking whiskey, jet-setting around the world and robbing us blind. Then, they were

hiding in their rat holes when the people needed them the most.

**Chitra Bahadur Kc**



■ The sorry state of the Nepali government exposed.

**Anita Gurung**

■ Thanks again for your moving reportage of villagers' suffering ('Life after deaths', Om Astha Rai, #757). Hope the Nepal government does not have deaf ears.

**Francesca Coles**

**DISASTER LESSONS**  
While I applaud Vinod Thomas' views and visions in the article relating to disasters in Nepal ('Learning from disasters', Vinod Thomas, #757), I would emphasise foremost the

importance to ensuring good governance in the country, which is unfortunately severely lacking. When governance system is largely in the grips of corrupt cronies, no means and measures whatsoever of mitigating disasters could be effective. After all, bad governance itself is a disaster.

**Dr Ek Raj Ojha**

■ You can have the best response teams, best disaster planning, etc., but when a national leader (Ram Sharan Mahat in this instance) says that #NepQuake15 was an "unimaginable event" you know the level of mendacity which has pervaded our society.

**Nam**

■ A new Nepal has to be born for young open-minded and good motivated leaders to rule ('Earning back the people's trust', Tsering Dolker Gurung, #757).

**Tashi Lama**

■ A good name lost can never be retrieved.

**Gauri Nath Rimal**

■ Even as we yearn for them to lead us and rebuild our country, we can be sure that these thugs will once again loot the people of aid money and relief goods. I will never trust them. They do not deserve our trust.

**Bairagi Khukuri**



In some places most families can only afford and understand local construction practices (Tsum, Langtang and other remote areas). In others there will be even stronger aspiration to rebuild concrete houses, especially in urban centres like Dhadingbesi, Charikot, Gorkha or Chautara.

Traditional masonry buildings, whether made of stone or mud-brick, can be reinforced with concrete tie-beams and steel columns but this is neither feasible nor desirable in many contexts. There will be a need to promote earthquake-resistant building methods and planning strategies that are appropriate to particular communities. Schools and homes that are intact or only slightly damaged need to be retrofitted.

Following the 2005 Kashmir earthquake, the local practice of using timber bracing (*dhajji dewari*) was widely adopted and over 120,000 houses were rebuilt using this technique in Pakistan. Similar methods have been adopted in Turkey, Italy, and Portugal after major earthquakes. There are other ways to build stronger homes using locally available materials, and this knowledge needs to be shared widely and conveyed to people engaged in reconstruction so that they can choose for themselves.

Transportation planning needs to be considered alongside rural reconstruction, given the impact of roads on a mountain landscape already prone to landslides. The survival of our towns and villages depends not just on their reconstruction but also on their ability to tread the ground lightly, respecting an unstable geology and climate.

In urban centres, there is an imperative to implement settlement planning that incorporates new open public spaces, earthquake-resistant community centres, and evacuation routes. Rebuilding of towns and urban centres must strengthen both community-level and government institutions, not undermine them. The idea to limit the height of buildings in the Kathmandu Valley may be misplaced since this can create other problems such as sprawl, which is disastrous in itself.

So far, there is little reason to hope that our elected leaders have either the understanding or the willingness to learn. The culture of business as usual was on full display on Wednesday as CA members scrambled shamelessly to hoard tents for themselves in the full glare of the media. However, we do have a savvy Minister of Urban Planning and officials with experience in relief and reconstruction in other parts of the world. They should be more assertive and proactively overcome the state's paralysing inertia and ignorance.

# Learning to learn lessons

Lives and livelihoods lost can prod us to rebuild this nation

A city of three million densely packed into haphazard dwellings in a Valley that used to be a former lake was always a recipe for disaster. The earthquakes were no surprise, what was surprising was the relatively low casualty rate.



**BY THE WAY**  
Anurag Acharya

One of the nightmare scenarios for Kathmandu was that transportation and communication would be hit and the capital would be cut off. That did not happen. Roads and the only international airport suffered minimum damage, electricity and phones were restored surprisingly swiftly.

However, the most encouraging sign was the sight of Nepal's young population rushing to deliver emergency aid – filling a gaping gap left by the government. Despite strong aftershocks still shaking the Valley and adjoining districts, young Nepalis were volunteering to collect relief and transporting it to where they were needed the most, sometimes at their own cost. Imagine what the demographic dividend Nepal would reap if we could channel that pent-up energy and commitment to nation-building.

At a time when a large swathe of country's rural population is toiling in foreign lands, the

spontaneous self-mobilisation of urban youth eased the pressure on state agencies. The government and the bureaucracy got a lot of flak for being late and disorganised with response. However, the scale of the disaster was such that it would have challenged even well-governed states. Nepal's security forces deserve a lot of praise for putting their lives on the line to save lives. The country has been fortunate to receive immediate help from governments around the world, which have sent in their disaster relief teams to aid search and rescue operations in the remote districts.

But the last three weeks have proven that Nepal needs to strengthen its capacity for disaster preparedness and response. After Tuesday's 7.3 magnitude aftershock triggered fresh landslides and destruction in Dolakha, Sindhupalchok, Rasuwa we have had to suddenly revert back to search and rescue, while continuing delivery of relief supplies. It is important that both go in tandem as we race against time to provide shelters to millions of people before the rains and ahead of winter.

Most families in Kavre and Sindhupalchok have already started building temporary shelters for themselves from local material and salvaged timber and bricks. This is only stopgap and the government must start delivering on a foolproof mechanism for subsidising home rebuilding.

Populations in landslide prone areas must be identified, and relocated before the monsoon when slope failure is going to be a constant danger. For the district capitals and Kathmandu Valley the government must finally start strictly enforcing its 25-year-old building code.

Large sections of the population in the affected areas outside Kathmandu Valley are subsistence farmers, they need help with seeds for the paddy planting season, otherwise they will go hungry for the rest of the year. In many ways, the monsoon season will seriously test us again.

So far, the amount pledged by the donors for reconstruction may be encouraging, but the actual amount received in the PM's relief fund is disappointing to say the least. Part of the fault is with the PMO which sent conflicting and confusing signals to potential donors already skeptical of the transparency in aid disbursement. The international community also has an opportunity to clean up its act, and not make the same mistakes it was severely criticised for in Haiti.

The inflow of aid money is making some political parties salivate, calling for revival of their discredited all-party mechanism at the local level which was a cartel to share the loot. Others are also demanding immediate local elections, while some want a national government.

In 2010, when a massive 8.8 magnitude quake hit Chile, only 525 people lost their lives and less than 9 percent of the affected population lost their homes. The same year, a 7.0 magnitude quake in Haiti killed over 100,000 people reducing the capital city to a rubble. Experts credit strict building codes and swift rescue for saving lives in Chile.

So, an earthquake doesn't kill people, lack of preparedness does. @AnuragAcharya

■ Well said, social capital in its enhanced form can help in reconstruction and building of resilient societies ('A more responsive state', David Seddon, #757).

Ramjee Bhandari

## AFTERSHOCK

While I truly appreciate the selfless work done by our soldiers since the 25 April quake, a few questions have been bothering me ('A state in aftershock', #757 by Victor Rana). Perhaps the general would like to respond why we have to import hundreds of rescue and relief workers from abroad when we have a 90,000 strong army and tens of thousands more in the APF and police? Even the rescue dogs were bideshi.

Now I'm not being a zealous patriot and I understand that the international teams have more experience and better resources. But why aren't our security forces equally well-equipped and trained given that our military budget is pretty large for a small-sized country? Post the 10-year conflict, I have been a staunch believer that the role of the security forces in Nepal should be limited to protecting wildlife and forests, responding to threats from natural disasters and taking part in peacekeeping missions abroad.

Therefore, going forward, I think our Army/APF should try to achieve international standards and must set an example in the region for disaster preparedness. Alas wide-spread corruption within our government and security forces will prove to be an obstacle yet again.

Liza Shrestha

## THIS WEEK



GOPEN RAI (102 LIKES)

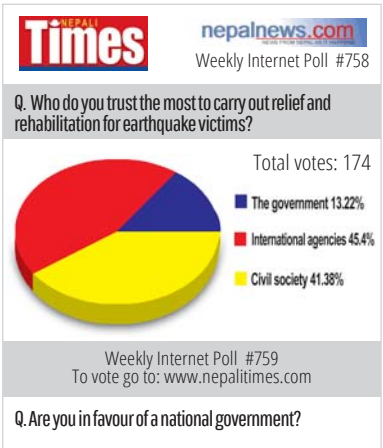
**Most liked on Facebook**  
A candlelight vigil was held last week at Dharahara in memory of the 25 April earthquake victims.

**Most shared on Facebook**  
A four-storey building collapsed in Nayabazar following the earthquake.

**Most popular on Twitter**  
A four-storey building collapsed in Nayabazar following the earthquake.

**Most visited online page**  
Bright lights on a dark day by Mark Zimmerman (1,688 views)

**Most commented**  
A state in aftershock by Victor Rana (15 comments)



साप्ताहिक खबरपत्रिका

# हिमाल

ग्राहक योजना

१ चैत्रदेखि

## हिमालको साथमा उपहार हातमा

अथवा

अथवा

**१ वर्ष**

ग्राहक शुल्क रु १७५० मा नगद छुट रु ५०

बाजेको सेकुवाबाट रु. १००० बराबरको कुपन अथवा मिडासको आकर्षक उपहार

**२ वर्ष**

ग्राहक शुल्क रु ३५०० मा नगद छुट रु १५०

गोल्ड स्टार शू को रु.१००० बराबरको गिफ्ट भौचर र साथमा पाइलट पेन सेट

**३ वर्ष**

ग्राहक शुल्क रु ५२५० मा नगद छुट रु २५०

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पाटनढोका, ललितपुर, मोवाईल: ९८४१ २४८ ८९४, ९८५१० ५४ ७२९

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# Lessons from Sichuan



**KUNDA DIXIT**

**BURIED:** Sichuan 12 May 2008 (left) and Nepal 25 April 2015.

CHENGDU – The epicentre of the 7.9 magnitude earthquake was 80km to the north-west, and everything swayed in the capital. Some older buildings crumbled. The tremors were felt 1,000km away in neighbouring countries. The airport was closed for a day, and then became the staging area for a massive relief operation. Highways were blocked by landslides, delaying emergency rescue and relief to the mountain villages. Up to 80 per cent of the buildings in poorer rural areas near the epicentre were destroyed, a UNESCO World Heritage Site was severely damaged. Strong aftershocks, some above 6 magnitude, kept hitting the area for weeks afterwards.

Sound familiar? That isn't a description of the 25 April Nepal Earthquake, but the one that struck China's Sichuan Province exactly seven years ago this week at 11:30 AM on 12 May 2008. The earthquake hit scattered communities in a remote part of China that was largely untouched

by the country's economic boom, and killed about 100,000 people, injuring nearly 400,000. An estimated 7 million people were left homeless.

The most tragic part of the Sichuan earthquake was that it struck during school hours killing thousands of teachers and students. Some 7,000 schools were destroyed, killing 5,500 children. In school after school in Wenchuan and Beichuan, teachers and students were crushed or trapped under shoddily-built school buildings. At least 1,700 were killed in just one school in Mianyang. The loss of children was so serious in a country with a strict one-child policy that the government made an exception for many parents allowing them to reverse their vasectomies.

Even though some 25,000 classrooms were destroyed in Nepal on 25 April, a similar catastrophe was averted here only because the earthquake struck on a Saturday. Still, about 1 million



KUNDA DIXIT

school-going children will be affected and may be attending classes in Temporary Learning Centres from next month.

China's emergency response was led by Premier Wen Jiabao himself, and was internationally praised for its prompt deployment. More than 3,000 people were rescued from the rubble in the immediate aftermath, and 100 helicopters were used in search, rescue and relief. Many who took part in the Sichuan relief work were part of the China International Rescue Team that was dispatched to Kathmandu on 28 April.

"We learnt many lessons from the earthquake, and some of them will be relevant for Nepal as it tries to deal with the aftermath of its disaster," said Dai Yonghong of Sichuan University Institute of South Asian Studies. "The top

agenda now should be economic transformation to build a beautiful Nepal in the future again."

Indeed, China's central government and Sichuan Province turned the crisis into an opportunity to invest \$150 billion for reconstruction, rehabilitation and relocation of some townships like Wenchuan and Beichuan. An investigation into collapsed schools showed that contractors cut corners and did not follow building codes.

A unique aspect of the reconstruction was that Chinese cities on the eastern seaboard were encouraged to 'adopt' individual towns in Sichuan affected by the earthquake and invest in their reconstruction. For example, Guangzhou adopted Wenchuan. "We unleashed the power of the whole country to help the reconstruction," said Zhihui Song

of Sichuan University.

At an India-China-Nepal trilateral cooperation conference hosted by the China West Normal University this weekend in Nanchong, the discussions were dominated by how Nepal's neighbours could help in Nepal's reconstruction. Participants felt that India's advantage was its proximity, and China would help with its experience from Sichuan in rebuilding homes, with construction equipment and financial assistance.

Rupak Sapkota, who is doing a PhD at Beijing's Renming University, said China should "think big" in Nepal's hour of need. "Post-earthquake reconstruction of Nepal could be the first big project that the Chinese-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank could be involved with in the region," he said. 🇨🇳

## The four-fold path

Could a stronger and more picturesque country emerge?

Nearly three weeks after the 25 April earthquake and the massive aftershock on 12 May, Nepal is entering the second phase of its recovery and reconstruction.

The government has established a National Reconstruction Fund to which it has allocated \$200 million, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has pledged another \$300 million and Japan has proposed to convene a donor group meeting. Despite this generous support from the outside world, the country's recovery will take many years.



**GUEST COLUMN**  
Pradumna B Rana

If the country's governance were to improve and appropriate policies adopted, a stronger and a more picturesque Nepal could emerge from the crisis. This is a tall order given the poor track-record of the government in delivery of services, mismanagement, and coordination, but

there is no harm in hoping.

Policy actions are required immediately on four fronts:

1. Since the government lacks credibility, there must be monitoring systems to oversee the newly-established National Reconstruction Fund. Watchdog bodies and community-based organisations should be in place to ensure transparency and accountability in the use of resources. Nepal has been in political transition since 2006 and the end of the conflict. Local government elections have not been held since 1999: instead, civil servants run the system from the capital. Corruption is pervasive at all levels. The Prime Minister's speech to the nation a few days after the quake disappointed many, and several top political leaders were conspicuous by their absence in the early days of the crisis.

Could this disaster lead to improved governance in Nepal? Sometimes devastating disasters can shake up a society so much that seemingly intractable problems can be resolved.

2. To rebuild the 600,000 damaged and destroyed homes innovative solutions like the Habitat Building System developed

by the Bangkok-based Asian Institute of Technology and others could be considered. These houses should be designed to complement and blend with the village scenery in Nepal, which attracts over 800,000 tourists every year.

3. Nepal has become one of the most remittance-dependent economies in the world. Before the earthquake 1,500 able-bodied workers left the country everyday for jobs abroad. This flow has now ebbed and some have, in fact, returned home to help out their families. Without jobs in the country to keep them in Nepal, they will surely leave again, perhaps in even larger numbers.

Innovative income-generating schemes like the 'cash for work' programs which were used by Mercy Corps in Aceh after the tsunami and in the Philippines after Super Typhoon Hainan. Essentially it means reconstruction itself creates jobs in rebuilding schools and infrastructure. Simply doling out money for rehabilitation is not a good idea as it will have adverse budgetary and monetary impacts.

4. Finally, in a study prepared for the ADB last year, a co-author and I have argued

that Nepal should strive to become a land link between China and India, as it was centuries before by improving connectivity both within the country as well as cross-border. Such a strategy would result in a more balanced development of the country. Nepal's founding member status in the China-initiated Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and its support of China's Silk Road Economic Belt policy are steps in the right direction.

Nepal experiences a major earthquake every 100 years or so. The government had legislated a new building code in 1996 but the code was poorly implemented because of poverty and poor governance. An important lesson for other countries prone to natural disasters from Nepal's experience is that there is no option but to be prepared. It is not good enough just to have laws and codes, they should be enforced. 🇳🇵

*Pradumna B. Rana is associate professor and coordinator of the International Political Economy Program in the Centre for Multilateralism Studies at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.*



# Bibeksheel Nepali shows how it is done

A party of youthful citizens shows what it means to be committed to the country above self

Nobody expected the landslide victory that propelled the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) led by Arvind Kejriwal to the Delhi Assembly in elections in February on an anti-corruption platform.



## BETWEEN THE LINES

Tsering Dolker Gurung

He had failed his voters once before, resigning abruptly after only 46 days in office. But the AAP sprang back riding on support from the working class and protest voters and defeated the ruling Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP), winning an astonishing 67 out of 70 assembly seats.

It's a different matter that post-victory the AAP's intra-party squabbles have made more news than its achievements in curbing endemic graft or following

dissent among the public against the UCPN(M) was made clear during the CA-2 elections when people chose to vote for veteran underperformers of the opposition parties. When you have nothing but fools to choose from, you settle for the ones who will do the least harm.

After the 2013 elections, the NC-UML coalition has shown the same lethargy and elastic morals that was their hallmark in the 1990s. The disillusionment of the people has turned to apathy, even as we were collectively affected by government inefficiency. All this became painfully apparent in the aftermath of the 25 April earthquake where the response was tardy, uncoordinated and inefficiently managed.

Nepalis are all concerned about the lack of accountability, transparency and responsibility on the part of the state. Already politically alert and aware about governance, the Nepali people are now so fed up that they have started looking for alternatives.

Can this angst against the state

candidacies from Kathmandu's most-competitive constituencies for the CA-2 elections. Thapa, a US-educated IT entrepreneur ran against two senior leaders (Narahari Acharya from the Nepali Congress Party and UML's Ishwor Pokharel) in Kathmandu-5 and lost. Bibeksheel's other three members also didn't win.

Undeterred by the loss, the group has spent the last two years building its image as an alternative political force, a people's party that's not made up of politicians, but everyday Nepalis who have been affected by Nepal's bureaucracy as much as you and I. Its extensive use of social media to circulate information about party activities, solicit donations, recruit more members and recently to update about rescue and relief efforts has not only increased its presence but bolstered its support base.

Youngsters who had no idea about the group before the earthquake are now spending their time and resources volunteering for the party. A friend's brother



through on its election promise of reducing the cost of utilities in the Indian capital. But what AAP's win showed was that voters do not shy from giving a chance to new and inexperienced political force that promises to undo the wrongs of previous governments.

It was with a similar kind of hope for a more inclusive Nepal that thousands of young Nepalis took up arms against the state 20 years ago. Millions more turned out to vote in 2008 for the rebel force, now a mainstream political party. The Maoist party subsequently failed on many fronts: failure to draft a new constitution, letting down the Nepali people and being mired in the same kind of greed and graft that they were purportedly against.

But the Maoist party's biggest failure was to lose its connection with the poor and marginalised that had elected it to power. The foot soldiers saw no difference between their idols who had now taken up the ways of the elite and the leaders they overthrew. The result of the growing

result in the ascendancy of a new force in Nepal much like India's AAP?

The group that comes closest to pulling it off may be the Bibeksheel Nepali party which like its Indian counterpart started out as a protest movement. Led by young, educated professionals, the group first took to streets to campaign against national shutdowns foisted on the people by the mainstream parties. It took up the cause of exploited migrant workers, violence against women, corruption in public offices and advocate for citizenship through mothers, drafting of a new constitution through the very popular 'Occupy Baluwatar' movement, 'Nepal Unites', and 'Nepal is Open' campaigns. These drives gained wide support via social media and became a meeting point for like-minded youth who though politically conscious weren't involved in the system.

In 2013, the group registered itself as a party and four of its members (*pic, above*) including party chair Ujjwal Thapa filed

who stepped in to transport relief supplies for Bibeksheel Nepali in his SUV tells me: "I have seen how committed they are. It's not just for social media. There are volunteers who don't sleep at night and spent hours packaging supplies because they have to be delivered in the morning." Another decided this was the group to recommend to eager donors in Nepal and abroad. "They are completely transparent about their finances," she explained.

Visit the party office at Maharajgunj any day and you will meet hundreds of young volunteers, all doing their bid to help fellow Nepalis in need.

"We started our relief work from the third day of the 25 April earthquake. We are now planning to move towards rehabilitation work," said Jeevan Shrestha who has been coordinating the party's relief distribution.

It may be too early to tout the party as one that'll uproot the dominance of three major parties but one thing's certain – they are being noticed. @Chenreeyang

## prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS



### Donation

Hyundai Motor Company has provided support of USD 300,000 for the relief of earthquake victims. The company handed over the donation to Nepal Red Cross Society who have been working for the rehabilitation of the victims since the day of the disaster.

### Partnership

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) have entered into a partnership to ensure that the need for sexual and reproductive health care of young girls, pregnant women and lactating mothers in Nepal is urgently met following the devastating earthquake of 25 April.



### Relief funds

Ruslan Vodka donated Rs 15 million to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund for the rescue, relief and reconciliation of the earthquake victims. The amount was handed over to Prime Minister Sushil Koirala.

### Cash and kind

Unilever Nepal has contributed Rs 2.5 million to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund as immediate assistance. Unilever also pledged an additional contribution of Rs one million worth of relief materials.



### Miles in cash

Etihad Guest, members of Etihad Airways' loyalty program has donated over 30 million Etihad Guest Miles to provide humanitarian aid to victims of the earthquake in Nepal. The miles are converted into cash which is then donated to the United Arab Emirates Red Crescent relief organisation to purchase blankets, food, medicine and to provide shelter for the thousands of injured and homeless people.



### Contribution

Everest Bank has contributed Rs five million towards the Prime Minister's Relief Fund for relief and rehabilitation of earthquake victims.



### Clean-up

Prabhu Bank as part of its corporate social responsibility cleaned the rubble at Jagat Narayan temple at Sankhamul. Around 60 employees

participated in the clean-up. The bank also donated cleaning materials to the management committee of the temple.

### Solar aid



Himalayan bank has announced a contribution of Rs 10 million to the

Prime Minister's Relief Fund and has decided to distribute 1,000 solar lanterns worth Rs one million. Habib bank, Himalayan's joint venture partner has also committed to making a contribution of Rs 10 million to the relief fund.







PICS: UNICEF



# Back to school

SAHINA SHRESTHA

The earthquake on 25 April had already damaged the four walls of the Basu Higher Secondary School in Bhaktapur, and then the 12 May aftershock brought down one of the classrooms. While the upper floors look fine, the ground floor has cracks and the floor of the auditorium was raised half an inch. Since the school has earthquake resilient buildings

the beams and pillars are still intact, but Principal Ambika Nyaichyai says the school's labs are now too unsafe to use. She is unsure how to restart classes for the 1,000 students enrolled here. The government had said schools would restart on Friday, but have been put off by two more weeks after the aftershock on Tuesday. Even so, there will be many schools in Sindhupalchok, Gorkha, Nuwakot that will not be able to open because 90 per cent of them have been completely destroyed. Eighty per cent of

schools have been razed in Dhading, and in Kathmandu Valley many schools are serving as temporary shelters. The government estimates that 24,000 classrooms were destroyed, and if the 25 April quake had struck on any other day besides Saturday, a lot of students would have lost their lives. "It will take time to rebuild and repair the buildings but more than that it will take time to get the fear out of children's mind and get them back to school," says Nyaichyai. "My niece's school has already reopened but she refuses to go back out of fear and parents are also unsure whether their children will be safe." UNICEF Nepal estimates that almost a million children will not be able to return to school immediately, but says going back to class and meeting friends again is important for children to overcome their fears. "Going back to school will help children cope better," says Tomoo Hozumi, Nepal Country Representative of UNICEF, "it also helps them recover from stress, which when left unattended can lead to trauma in children. Since most of the learning materials at home and school are gone, UNICEF and its

local partners are working to replenish these and restart classes as soon as possible in Temporary Learning Centres and child-friendly spaces in 14 districts, most affected by the quakes. "In these safe spaces children have an opportunity to come and be children. They can play and interact with their friends and peers. These spaces also give us an opportunity to provide key messages to children as well as caregivers," says Marilyn Hoar, UNICEF's Education Chief. Child friendly spaces set up in Kathmandu and Lalitpur offer children a chance to be involved in colouring, playing games, singing songs and engaging in activities where they can have fun together. After the government announces date for reopening schools, these spaces will transition into learning centres where classes will come together with their teachers. "It also allows caregivers to have a place where they know their children are safe and looked after, and that they can go deal with other needs including food and in some cases finding missing family members," says Hoar. For other members of education cluster working in affected districts to set up temporary learning spaces, UNICEF provides tarpaulins, school-kits (for school going kids), early child development kits for children aged 3-4, and recreation kits. Each kit comes with WASH facilities, and people involved in child protection work closely with children and caregivers providing them with psychosocial counseling. UNICEF is also assisting the Department of Education on the structural assessment of school buildings to see if they are safe. Hozumi insists that when the schools are rebuilt, they need to be earthquake resistant and located in safe places. "We need to build resilience and preparedness right from the beginning of relief, reconstruction and rehabilitation activities," he says. "Contingency plans at schools can save the lives of many students and disaster risk preparedness needs to be a priority." 🇳🇵



## Learning inside camps

The 25 April earthquake has damaged over 24,000 classrooms and UNICEF Nepal estimates almost a million children won't be able to return to schools immediately. With schools set to reopen only beginning of June, local initiatives like the Kehi Garoun Nepal (KG Nepal), a not-for-profit organisation, which provides necessary supplies to students of public schools, have set up temporary learning camps. Last Monday the organisation started an activity camp at Kanya Mandir School where 66 children, between the ages of seven and 14, participated on the first day. Reecha Acharya, coordinator of the camp says all activities are based on fun learning. "Children will still be taught mathematics but in a ludic way," she explains. Priya Regmi, 18, an undergraduate student is one of the 19 volunteers running different workshops at the camp. "It's important that students of government schools still receive education," she tells *Nepali Times*. The project is called Resuming Schools, Resuming Lives as it indirectly also helps parents rebuild their lives. "Adults who have to take care of their children cannot look for new jobs or look after the repairment needed in their houses," says Acharya. Another purpose of the camp is to help children with trauma, as Umanga Pandey, chairperson of KG Nepal explains. "Students can decide what activity they want to do," he says. "We don't want to traumatise them more by forcing them to do something they don't." KG Nepal's camp is open to all students in the district. The group had initially planned to run the camp for only a month but will now continue for as long as possible and has plans to open similar centres outside Kathmandu. "We understand that the hardly-hit regions have other priorities now, but in time they will need education" says Acharya. *Stéphane Huët*



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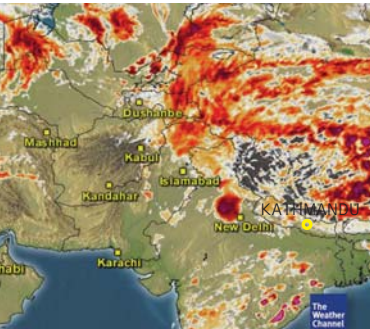


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The weather gods thankfully took pity on people sleeping out in the open again this week after Tuesday's aftershock, and the thunderstorms kept away. But we may not be so lucky going into the weekend when a low pressure system spawned by a huge trough in the southern subcontinent will also affect Central Nepal, bringing afternoon and night storms and rain. These are characteristics of pre-monsoon showers, when the prevailing wind is still from the west and there is moisture infusion from the Arabian Sea. The monsoon is still at least a month away, and that will buy time for the government to provide shelter to earthquake survivors.

FRIDAY	29° 18°	SATURDAY	29° 16°	SUNDAY	31° 18°
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GETTING BACK ON TRACK

Encouraged by employees, factory owner decides to open workshop few days after the earthquake.

PICS: GOPEN RAI

SAHINA SHRESTHA

It was Saturday and Kali Bahadur Pahari (*pic, right*) was at his home in Badikhel when a 7.8 magnitude earthquake shook Central Nepal. The first floor of his two-storey house was badly damaged. Luckily, his family escaped unhurt.

A long time employee of Everest Pashmina Knitting and Weaving Industry in Jharuwabasi, Pahari came back to work a few days after the earthquake. Like him, there were other employees eager to get back to work even though the back wall of the building where the sewing stations were located had collapsed and the main office and warehouse were damaged.

Fifty employees worked together to clean up the mess and get the factory up and running. An engineer was called who assessed the buildings and supervised the reconstruction of the back wall. Three weeks after the earthquake half of the 300 employees are back at work, producing handcrafted pashmina products.



Reopening the factory so soon wasn't an easy decision for Santosh Gurung, owner of the small family-owned business in the south-west corner of the Valley. One-third of the workers had damaged homes and a seamstress lost her life. But seeing that his employees were eager to be back at work, he decided to go ahead with the production.

"Opening the factory was important not only for employees who depend on us for livelihood but also because we owe it

**SHOP OPEN:** Seamstresses work on sweater designs at the Everest Pashmina Warehouse two weeks after the earthquake on 25 April (*above*).

Fifty employees including Kali Bahadur Pahari (*left*) worked together to clean up the mess and get the factory up and running.

to our customers to deliver the products on time," says Gurung. "It is also the best way to begin the recovery process."

Products made at Everest Pashmina are exclusively exported to countries like Spain and Luxemburg. "It will still take a few weeks to go into full production but at least we have started work for now," says Gurung, who is currently busy rectifying the buildings. "Come end of the year the buildings will have been rectified to withstand earthquakes up to 9 magnitude," he adds.

He is also collecting funds to help employees whose homes have been damaged to rebuild. "My customers have extended their help and for that I am forever grateful," he says.

Robin Boustead, a customer of Everest Pashmina for nearly two years has launched a campaign in Indiegogo, a crowdfunding and fundraising website, to collect relief funds for earthquake victims in Nepal. His brand Mirror in the Sky caters to large multinational companies to small boutiques and will be donating 10 per cent of all sales to disaster relief programs in Nepal.

Boustead believes that combining emergency aid with long-term business partnership is the best combination of immediate assistance and helping people to rebuild their lives.

"We had planned to launch our Indiegogo campaign for our Signature Designs, but then the earthquake happened and really it became an opportunity to provide relief funds and highlight the need for business partners to stick by Nepal," says Boustead. "The situation will deteriorate further if the overseas communities desert Nepal and we want to make a very vocal point about loyalty and support." 🇳🇵

ALL NEW

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# SHAKEN BUT

PHOTOGRAPHS by  
**JAN MØLLER HANSEN**

**A**midst the ruins of what used to be their homes, Kathmandu residents sifted through the rubble to salvage belongings and raw materials to reconstruct new ones. Neighbours helped neighbours, even the youngest members of families lent a helping hand. Sometimes complete strangers stopped by for support.

Children helped their parents and siblings to clear sites of what used to be their homes.

And in the midst of it all, people who lost everything had time to pause and smile and offer visitors tea.

The earthquake may have devastated Central Nepal, spreading death and destruction, but it also brought out the resilient and self-

reliant spirit of the Nepali people to restore their homes, their heritage, the culture and identity of Nepal. The international goodwill and support was overwhelming, Nepal has lots of friends.

 [nepalitimes.com](https://nepalitimes.com)  
■ For more pictures 







# STRONG

**READY TO FACE ADVERSITY** (clockwise from top, left):

Father and son arrive in Bhaktapur, fleeing earthquake damage in their district to the east.

A women in Bungamati smiles amidst the ruins of her house.

Two young women at the town square in Bungamati, which was severely damaged by the first earthquake on 25 April.

Children help parents remove debris and rubble from what used to be their home in Bungamati.

Mother and daughter clean up the rubble of their home in Bungamati.

Husband and wife with their baby at a shelter in Bungamati. Their home was completely destroyed.

This boy has been living in a temple courtyard in Bungamati under a plastic sheet with his family after their home was destroyed.







PHOTOS OF LANGTANG VILLAGE TAKEN IN 2013 BY FRITZ BERGER



# DURING

A joyous day turns to pure terror




25 April 2015 will remain in my mind forever. I thought it was the end for me, my pregnant wife, Pauline, and our two-year-old daughter, Margaux. It started well that Saturday morning in Langtang. It was Pauline's

# BEFORE

Langtang only a memory now

The Swiss have always had a great affinity for Langtang, ever since a yak cheese factory was established there in 1955, which is still running. I first trekked to Langtang via Sundarimal and Gosainkunda in 1975 when I came to Nepal to work for Swiss Development Cooperation. Langtang Village with its stone houses, carved wooden windows and shingle roofs was bucolic, the villagers had all taken their yaks to high pasture since it was summer. In Kyangjin, the cheesemaker proudly gave me a slice of hard yak cheese to taste, cut from a disc that would be carried over Ganja La to Kathmandu. That night we set up our tents on a flat meadow, the mountains glowed in starlight. When I went back there in 2013, there were 40 new lodges in Kyangjin and many more in Langtang Village. There were more than 300 trekkers in Langtang that autumn, and the locals were busy, and

the cheesemaker was happy to announce that there was shortage of cheese. I appreciated Langtang not just for the scenery and the warm hospitality of the people but also for the enormous biodiversity of the pristine Langtang National Park that goes from sub-tropical to bamboo groves, the birch and rhododendron trees alive with red pandas, and then the coniferous forests, the alpine meadows and the Arctic desert of the mountains. Few visitors go to the other side of Langtang River from Kyangjin to enjoy several small lakes with crystal blue water reflecting the fluted ridges of Gang Chhenpo in the distance. I still cannot believe that the village is gone, but Langtang is still there and so is the indomitable spirit of the people of this incredible holy valley who will rebuild their lives and heritage.  Fritz Berger







A SHOT OF KYANGJIN GOMPA VILLAGE AFTER AN AVALANCHE TRIGGERED BY THE 25 APRIL EARTHQUAKE DESTROYED HALF OF THE HOUSES THERE BY AYMERIC CLOUET

birthday and we were together with our little family, waiting for the fourth one to come. My friend Colin and I put on our cross-country skis and left the lodge owned by my Nepali friend, Gyalbu. We crossed Kyangjin Gompa village (3860m) and went down the bridge

leading to Ganja La on the other side. The weather wasn't that great, the snow hadn't frozen enough, and I hadn't slept well. So we went back to our rooms. Around 11.30AM, Margaux proudly gave her mum a bracelet we had bought together

in the village. She's only two and we were at 3800m: I'm proud of my daughter. A few minutes later, Colin joined us in the main room of the lodge. It was great to start an expedition in Nepal in such a serene atmosphere: with a friend and my family all welcomed into

Gyalbu's lodge. Just before noon, the ground started shaking. We had enough time to understand that it was an earthquake. "Everybody out!" I grabbed Margaux and rushed outside. The quake became stronger, and we jumped over the terrace to get away from everything that could crumble upon us. Stones were falling from the walls and we wondered which building was going to collapse first. All the villagers were out, there was a terrible commotion. As the shaking stopped, we heard a loud scream. A monstrous snow cloud burst out of the fog from above the moraine. We were already sprinting in the opposite direction.

I looked back, the avalanche was already upon us. We couldn't race it. I took shelter behind a house and protected my daughter. Dirty snow was falling on us, my daughter started to cry. The walls were not able to resist the shockwave. I put my polar fleece over Margaux's head so she wouldn't choke in the blowing snow. I was wondering where Pauline and Colin were. The snow stopped blowing, I have seen avalanches before but nothing as big and powerful as this one. Margaux had 'snow dreadlocks' in her hair. I got rid of the snow so she wouldn't get sick. Pauline came out of the crowd, she was safe but she was covered in snow.

I wanted to take Pauline and Margaux to a safe area so they would be protected from another avalanche. There was still mist all around us. We were away from the cliffs below Langtang Lirung, and I hoped Kyangjin Ri should have protected us, but it was hard to tell where it would be the safest. Colin was still missing, and I went to look for him leaving Pauline and Margaux sheltered under a makeshift tent, made of plank, tarpaulins and bed covers from a devastated hotel.

Colin had apparently ran towards the slope below the village. I reached the edge of the slope but the fog prevented me from seeing below. I think I called out for Colin. I found Nepalis helping each other climb up the slope. There was one with a bleeding head due to a scalp wound. Another one was lying with his body contorted and head down, no one was helping him. He was unconscious, and moaning when I tried to wake him up, he seemed to be in pain. Then I saw Colin slowly walking towards us, painfully climbing up the slope. We carried the wounded back to the village. I couldn't believe what was happening, It took a few minutes to turn a joyous day into pure terror. We reached the ledge overlooking Langtang Village, and couldn't believe our eyes. The village was not there anymore. Half of the houses had disappeared.

The ground was still shaking, and we were worried that there would be another avalanche. What if it happened at night? We wouldn't be able to see anything. The aftershocks came through the night, but no avalanche. This lasted three days but it seemed like eternity. We left, but many of our Nepali friends are still there. There were more landslides and avalanches, and the Tuesday aftershock must have made it worse. While waiting for rescuers we learnt that Langtang Village, only two hours on foot from Kyanjin, had been wiped off the map. All those living in Kyanjin are originally from Langtang, many of their families were perished. After travelling for 24 hours, we found ourselves safe and sound in our own house in France. The memories make it hard to sleep. Our only wish is to try to help the people of Nepal the best we can. 🇳🇵

*Aymeric Clouet*



SPANISH RESCUE WORKERS WITH SNIFFER DOGS LOOK FOR BODIES ON WHAT'S LEFT OF LANGTANG VILLAGE ON 4 MAY. LUISMI ORTIZ / OCPUME

## AFTER

"I had never seen an avalanche like this"

After details of the full horror of the avalanche in Langtang started trickling out a few days after the 25 April earthquake, a specialised team of Spanish mountain rescuers with sniffer dogs and forensic experts arrived in Kathmandu, and immediately took helicopters to this scenic valley 40km north of the capital. What they saw on 2 May was a scene of utter devastation, an entire village of about 500 people had been buried under 100m of boulders, mud and ice. A huge chunk of the Langtang Lirung Glacier had broken off at 6,000m, bulldozing through the moraines and tumbling over a cliff to the settlement below. Shock waves preceding the avalanche of thousands of tons of ice and rock falling 3km straight down had blown away dozens of houses with people in them. Such was the force of the blast that it flattened a forest on the other side of the Valley. "I thought I had seen everything everywhere. I have been to a lot of disasters, but I have never seen an avalanche like this," Fernando Rivero Diaz of the mountain rescue team of the Spanish Guardia Civil told us on Saturday before flying

back home. The team made 12 sorties from Kathmandu in dawn-to-dusk search and rescue, but it was obvious that the village with everyone in it had been wiped off the map. The mission turned into retrieval and identification of the bodies of some of the hundreds of villagers and trekkers. Some 50 tourists are still missing, and the Spanish team could find only two of the bodies of the eight Spanish trekkers in Langtang. Many of the photographs taken by the Spanish team are too gruesome to be shown, and there is a video of the dogs barking through the buried roof of what used to be a trekking lodge. Some of the victims had been blown right across to the opposite mountainside, the shock waves having torn the flesh away leaving only skeletal remains. "This was a multidimensional crisis, we had to do search and rescue, forensic identification, evacuate the wounded and the survivors and get them on flights out of Kathmandu," explained Spain's ambassador to India and Nepal, Gustavo de Aristegui who was in Kathmandu for the past two weeks to direct the operation. "We are grateful to the Nepal Army, the Indians and the Chinese. We are just saddened that it wasn't possible to find all the remains." This week, the Nepal Army evacuated remaining families from Kyangjin, which is threatened by more landslides and avalanches following aftershocks. Settlements along the narrow gorges of the Langtang River near Ghoda Tabela and Lama Hotel, which were hit by avalanches and rockfalls have also been taken to Dhunche. 🇳🇵 *Kunda Dixit*



# I help, therefore I am

Hi all,  
It has almost been 3 weeks since the big earthquake and the strong aftershock last Tuesday, we are slowly starting to get back into our usual routines, while there are still plenty of people who are concerned with how they will



**ASK ANJANA ANYTHING**  
Anjana Rajbhandary

shelter themselves during the upcoming monsoon season because they have lost their homes. In such tragedies, we have philanthropists and helpful individuals out there, spending hours of their days calling, coordinating and delivering relief aid to those in need, hours out of the capital. Altruism is an admirable quality in humans when we work to help others, it is something people do to benefit others without expecting anything in return. However, it is rare for individuals or groups to help without seeking any validation for what they have done. There is definitely more of 'look at how I am helping' than 'look at how s/he is helping'. It hard

to find those who will help without seeking any credit and that is just how it works. Helping others is a very noble thing, though at times some get so busy promoting themselves that they forget the main purpose of the help. "I just donated Rs 100,000 to a cause" status update or posting pictures of self holding the edge of a sack of rice while giving it away is probably not the most modest way to go. But right now, some help is better than no help.

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

**Hello Anjana,**  
**I respect individuals who are going out of their way to help the earthquake victims and their families. But it annoys me to see so many of them posting regularly on social media about the help they are providing to the survivors - as if it was a competition. I feel they are more concerned with showing off what they are doing than actually helping others. I hate this cheesy atmosphere. Some say I'm cynical or insensitive, others say I'm in complete denial. But I feel I'm just trying to move ahead. What is wrong with me?**

-FT

**AR:** I think I understand what you are saying. It is natural for you to feel frustrated. It is great to see so many individuals and organisations helping. I also believe that when you help, it is not necessary to announce to everyone what you have done because it defeats the purpose of altruism. Nowadays, self-promotion has become a socially acceptable behavior. Social media has given rise to a vain generation who is self-obsessed and need to show others what they have done for validation. Also, there are some international donors who donate to charities and are not present at location, they want to see how their money is being used. That's the current world for you. Very few people will go out of their way to help others without expecting anything back. That being said in the current situation, victims need help and it is definitely better that people help than not at all, even if they want to be temporary 'mini-celebrities'. But, there are good people out there who are silently doing more, proving that selfless people still exist. 🇳🇵

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

## HAPPENINGS



BIKAS RAUNIAR

**BYE-BYE:** Members of Medical Corps of Israeli Defence Forces pose for a picture during the closing ceremony of Israeli Field Hospital at Chhauni in Kathmandu on Sunday.



KUNDA DIXIT

**SICHUAN ASSISTANCE:** President Li Jian of China West University presenting \$15,000 raised by students and faculty for Nepal earthquake relief to former Foreign Minister Madhav Ghimire on 6 May in Nanchong, Sichuan.



RSS

**DOUBT CLEARANCE:** (right to left) Magsaysay Award Winner Dr Sanduk Ruit, actors Madan Krishna Shrestha, Hari Bansha Acharya and cricketer Paras Khadka during an interaction meeting with officials from National Planning Commission on Sunday.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

**STORYTELLING:** Earthquake survivors Dawa Sherpa (left) of Sindhupalchok and Dawa Tamang (right) of Gorakhshep recount their experience at a program organised by School of Creative Communications at Kupondole.



DEVAKI BISTA

**TO THE RESCUE:** A Nepal Army personnel carries an injured man for treatment at Bir Hospital on Tuesday.

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# Searching for a heart of gold

Dambar Krishna Shrestha in  
*Himal Khabarpatrika*, 10-16 May

हिमाल  
खबरपत्रिका

Ten days after the earthquake, my colleagues and I headed to parts of Rasuwa, Makwanpur and Nuwakot that hadn't received any relief at that time. We went there as both journalists and relief workers, carrying supplies bought with funds collected from friends and families.

As our car drove into Gerku village of Nuwakot in the mid-afternoon on 6 May, we saw an elderly woman (*see pic*). "I have no one left in the world," she said, her face at the window of the car. Although our initial plan was to eat first, and then begin distributing the supplies we had brought, our hunger subsided after seeing her. Handing her a packet of instant noodles and two packs of biscuits, I told her: "Eat these for now, we will come back to you later."

"Why are you giving me so much, please give these to others," she said and returned the biscuits.

When our driver Sanu Kancha Tamang tried to give her money, the woman initially refused to accept saying, "Why do you have to give me money when I don't even have a purse." She later accepted the money, tucking the notes inside her *patuka*.

Himal's photojournalist Devaki Bista tried to hug her but the woman threw her hands away saying, "What have you done, girl? Don't you know that I am an untouchable Dalit?"

"Aama, what is your name? How old are you?" I asked.

"I don't remember my name. I was four during the 1934 earthquake," she replied.

My eyes welled up, Devaki was also tearing up. Sitting behind us, stand-up comedian Manoj Gajurel looked sombre. Never had I seen the man who is always making others laugh so serious.

The great earthquake has brought Nepalis together. A lot of individual Nepalis not affiliated to any charity or the government have come forward to help with rescue and relief. Thousands of Nepalis living abroad have returned home with supplies, while those who are still outside continue to donate generously. Amidst the sense of shared humanity in the aftermath of the earthquake there are, however, some who are so greedy they see the tragedy as



an opportunity to profit. They are usually the ones who are already well off.

In Kathmandu we saw people with luxurious apartments and bungalows fight with homeless people over tents. A well-to-do store owner in Nuwakot had no shame telling us to leave our supply of mosquito nets with him reasoning there were no mosquitoes higher up the mountains in Rasuwa. Relief materials collected by a group of young entrepreneurs from Pokhara meant for distribution to remote villages in Rasuwa was seized by those who didn't need it. In Sindhupalchok looting relief supplies by young musclemen is common. There are also people who claim they haven't received any help and continue to take packages meant for those in need.

In Gerku too there were people who had already received tents, and food demanding they be given as much as another villager who had received nothing so far. People who were bedecked in gold necklaces and rings were giving relief workers a list of things they needed. I kept searching for the elderly woman in the crowd. But I didn't find her. We set aside food supplies and a blanket for her and left them with a local youth, Damodar Ghimire. We didn't have to give her a tent because we heard she lived with whoever gave her a place to sleep for the night.

When the angry crowd started getting unruly, we took the remaining supplies back to the car. As our car drove back to Kathmandu, I kept thinking of the grandmother with a heart of gold who despite being in need herself thought of others first.

# Relief superstar

Annapurna Post, 12 May

अन्नपूर्ण पोष्ट

Under the initiative of Nepali actor Rajesh Hamal, relief materials worth Rs 1.6 billion was brought to Nepal on two chartered FedEx Express aircrafts, first of which landed on Saturday and the second on Monday. The relief materials which contained large volumes of IV solutions, medicines, surgical supplies and other medical essentials was sent by American non-profit medical organisation, Direct Relief.

The medical supplies will be handed to Nepali NGO Possible that has been working to provide free quality healthcare to people in far-west Nepal.



Actor Rajesh Hamal was present at Tribhuvan International Airport on Monday evening to receive the aid from chairman and CEO of Direct Relief, Thomas Tighe.

"FedEx has waived Rs 75 million, the fare of both the aircrafts as their commitment to helping the earthquake victims of Nepal," informed SP Kalaunee of Possible.



**Board:** Earthquake victims  
**Sack:** Aid  
**Coat:** International donors



कान्तिपुर

Batsayan in *Kantipur*, 12 May

# Tears of joy

Sudeep Shrestha in *Nagarik*, 11 May

नागरिक

They say the earthquake that struck Nepal on 25 April was 7.8 magnitude, but what Rasmila Awal felt on that fateful afternoon cannot be measured on any scale.

Rasmila had gone to a nearby shop before the noon, leaving her two children, 10-year-old Sonia and four-month-old Sonit, at home. Sonia was watching a Hindi serial on the tv and baby Sonit was asleep.

Suddenly the home started swaying violently and cracks started to appear on the walls. Sonia ran outside, but realised that her brother was still inside. She returned, picked up her brother and started running outside. But the house had started to crumble by then, and she could not move her trapped feet. She held her brother tightly against her chest.

A wooden cupboard fell over Sonia and she lost hold of her brother, and she does not remember what happened after that. Rasmila rushed back to see her house coming down, her feet trembled and she wanted to cry but no sound came out.

Rasmila's neighbours started digging through the debris to rescue the children. Half an hour later, they found a little leg covered with dust. As they dug deeper, they found Sonia who was alive but unconscious.

Sonit was still missing, and although the neighbours dug furiously they couldn't find him, and assumed the worst. They consoled Rasmila, saying at least one of her children survived. Rasmila had no more tears left. She could not utter a word, and stood frozen.

It was 9PM, and the survivors were preparing to sleep out in the open. Just then, they heard a baby crying from under the ruin of the house. Rasmila knew that it was her baby.

Nepal Army personnel arrived and started digging. Rasmila's newfound hope slowly ebbed as the soldiers couldn't find her baby. She could not sleep all night, every second was like a year.

Before dawn the next morning, neighbours started digging again and the soldiers returned. They could now hear the baby's cry. It was 10 AM when Dipak Rai of the Nepal Army pulled Sonit out of the rubble. He was covered in dirt and was not able to open his eyes, but he was alive and surprisingly unhurt.

Rai cleaned Sonit's eyes, and dusted his clothes. Sonit was perhaps hungry and started sucking his own fingers when Rasmila took him in her arms and held him tightly. Suddenly, Rasmila could cry again, but these were tears of joy.

Two weeks later, moments after a 7.1 magnitude aftershock rattled Kathmandu yet again, I reached Bhaktapur. Everyone looked scared about the new shaking, but Rasmila was unflustered. She had gone through worse than a mere aftershock. She was breastfeeding Sonit who was snuggled in his mother's lap.

Amidst all these pain and worry, she smiles, consoles herself and says: "I don't care what the earthquake damaged. That can be rebuilt again. What couldn't have been rebuilt was not damaged by the earthquake."

*Sonit Awal's rescue on the front page of Nepali Times #756, 1-7 May, and Bijay Rai's photograph of Rasmila with her baby on the front page of Nagarik, 12 May.*



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# A CONCRETE FUTURE

**SONIA AWALE**

In a narrow alleyway deep in the heart of Patan adjacent to the ruins of a clay-mortar house, a four-storey concrete block stands tall, unscathed except for some minor cracks. In street after street of the ancient towns in the Valley, centuries-old temples and ancestral homes have been reduced to rubble right next to buildings made of concrete.

On another narrow lane near Mangal Bazar there is now a pile of bricks where there used to be a house with its first two floors made of bricks and clay. The owner had added three concrete floors on top of it. A family of seven lived there, and four of them were killed when the entire structure collapsed during the earthquake on 25 April. On either side of this house, two five-storey buildings made of reinforced concrete are still standing.

“We learnt during this earthquake that cement houses are stronger,” said 41-year-old mother of two, Mira Maharjan, who is afraid that her own brick-and-mud house may not withstand another quake. “But my parents live in a cement house, so I am not worried.” Maharjan works in Patan Museum and was lucky to survive the collapse of the east wing of Sundari Chok.

Because so many of Kathmandu’s concrete-built structures survived, it has confirmed public perception that these are structurally safer than

traditional clay-mortar brick buildings. However, engineers specialising in seismic-resistant housing say Nepalis may have been lulled into a false sense of security with this renewed trust in concrete.

They say the way moulds for reinforced concrete beams and slabs are prepared and the use of substandard raw materials may make these houses less safe in future quakes. Reinforced concrete in itself isn’t bad, but it needs knowhow and training for the buildings to be durable.

“The only reason reinforced concrete structures survived this time was that the intensity and duration of the earthquake was not as big as predicted,” said Padma Sundar Joshi of the United Nations Human Settlements Program (HABITAT). “If the intensity was a notch higher and if the shaking had gone on for 10 seconds longer, reinforced concrete structures would have also come down.”

The 7.3 magnitude aftershock on Tuesday brought down concrete buildings already weakened by the main quake three weeks ago, and forced people back to shelters in open spaces. Maharjan had already gone back to her house, but returned to her shelter at the royal garden of Patan Darbar.

“I was taking pictures of the damage of my brick house when another one hit us,” said Maharjan. “I don’t know when I’ll go back to my own house.”

The problem lies with traditional masons who lack the training and knowledge to ready concrete moulds, and often do not know how to prepare joints for iron rods, they do not follow time limits on mixing cement, and design houses with unsafe cantilevers and unnecessary decorations. Joshi warned: “If we don’t change the way we work with cement in Nepal, building more reinforced concrete houses will lead to disaster.”

Bijay Karmacharya is a Nepali engineer currently working for post-disaster housing in Burma, and likens building homes to visiting a doctor. “If you need an operation, you go to a qualified surgeon. But if you want to make a house, why don’t you go to a qualified engineer? After all, both

professions are essentially about saving lives.”

Kathmandu already has a strict urban building code prepared in 1993 containing specific guidelines for the design, construction and mandatory rule of thumb (MRT) for buildings up to three floors. This code now needs to be revised and enforced.

Bijay Krishna Upadhaya of the National Society for Earthquake Technology – Nepal (NSET) advised the Pakistan government after the 2005 earthquake, and said disasters offer an opportunity to reform housing criteria and enforce safety guidelines.

“In Pakistan, reinforced concrete buildings collapsed even though it was an earthquake of much lower intensity because required procedures for concrete were not followed. The same could happen here next time,” he said.

## RURAL RECONSTRUCTION


Seismologists have been surprised by the scale of the destruction in the mountain districts north of Kathmandu because they had expected much more devastation in the Valley. Now, they worry that many families will build reinforced concrete houses in district headquarters or in villages where engineering norms are even less strictly followed than in the city.

Upadhyay said: “If new reinforced concrete houses are not properly made, you don’t even need a 7 magnitude earthquake to bring them down.”

The big challenge for rehabilitation in rural Nepal now will be to make sure that people have emergency shelters for the coming rainy season, and then build safe permanent houses for the future (*see box*). “We shouldn’t just be promoting emergency shelters for the monsoon, they should also be warm enough for the coming winter,” Joshi said.

At HABITAT and NSET, experts believe that the next phase after emergency tent and tarpaulin is for the mass distribution of corrugated sheets which can be used for roofing of improvised houses made from salvaged bricks which can be recycled for building permanent homes later. Nepal currently produces 80,000 tin sheets every day, and this production capacity is enough to meet demand.

The Nepal Engineering Association (NEA) has deployed 3,000 engineers to go house-to-house for a rapid assessment of buildings to categorise them as liveable, repairable and ones that need to be demolished. After the earthquake and aftershocks, many families haven’t gone back to their homes even though they are safe or can be retrofitted.

Upadhyay reckons that one-third of the 600,000 houses that were either destroyed or damaged in the earthquake can be repaired, and this would be cheaper than rebuilding them. 



**MUD VS CEMENT:** Mira Maharjan points at her parent’s reinforced concrete structure in Patan that withstood the earthquake (*right*) and a brick and clay-mortar house that is in danger of collapsing (*left*).





Nepalis may have been lulled into a false sense of security about the strength of reinforced concrete structures.



PICS: KUNDA DIXIT

# Cheap, light, quick

**T**wo weeks after the 7.8 magnitude earthquake rattled central Nepal, attention is now turning to reconstruction of the estimated 600,000 houses that have been either damaged or destroyed. The government and relief agencies are struggling to provide emergency shelters suitable for both the approaching monsoon and winter, while trying to decide how best to ensure cheap, easy-to-make and safe permanent homes for the 8 million people in

Central Nepal who are affected.

The scale of the need is overwhelming, and many survivors who have tents are now demanding tin roofing. Others have already started to rebuild destroyed homes with salvaged material, while some are using local bamboo and thatch to make temporary housing. City-based groups also offer a range of options for cheap, easy-to-build homes that can be mass produced.



## Bamboo

Bamboo is perceived as a poor man's building material, and is looked down upon. However, it is plentiful, strong and can be turned into light, cheap and attractive homes. There are many options available depending on the size of the family and can be constructed in three months, and can last at least 25 years. While a concrete building can cost Rs 3.5 million and nine months to build, a bamboo home with basic amenities will cost only Rs 500,000 and can be put up in three months after builders are trained.

[www.abari.org](http://www.abari.org)

## Adobe

Mud has got a bad reputation after this earthquake because so many clay-mortar brick buildings could not withstand the shaking. Even though it will be difficult to convince people to go for mud, adobe housing can be buttressed, made earthquake resistant and can be quite attractive. Mud construction is also light, and has better insulation properties. It just needs to be protected from rain and moisture.

[www.abari.org](http://www.abari.org)



## Resilient Homes

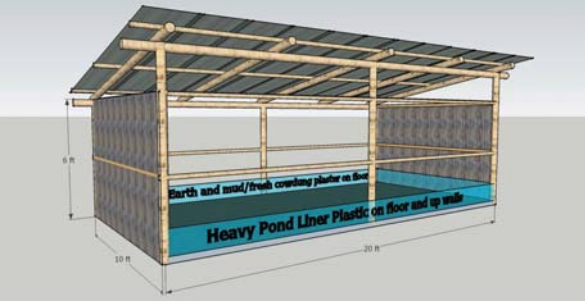
'Resilient Homes' is promoted by Himalayan Climate Initiative (HCI) with steel frames as an option for rebuilding homes and schools. These low cost, quick-to construct modular prototypes can convert into permanent structures later. They are replicable and expandable meaning the owners can improve it when they can afford the time and money. The budget is comparable to current market prices for houses with the same floor area.

[www.himalayanclimate.org](http://www.himalayanclimate.org)

## Earthbag

This method evolved from military bunker construction techniques is inexpensive and quick to put up. Earthbag schools in eastern Nepal withstood the 25 April earthquake, and temporary shelters made of earthbags have been used extensively in Pakistan after the Kashmir Earthquake of 2005. Plastic bags are filled with sand, stone dust, gravel and moulded into modular shape for stacking into walls. The roof can be made of bamboo, thatch or corrugated tin at the site itself.

[www.unhabitat.org.np](http://www.unhabitat.org.np)



## Transitional hut

Everything Organic Nursery located in Kavre has come up with a design for transitional homes for families of five to six that could be used for a year or more until a permanent house can be built. They are expandable and the design is based on the traditional thatch hut (*chapro*) and uses bamboo or wooden pole frame and corrugated metal roof. The walls are made of bamboo strips and are plastered with a clay/fresh cow dung plaster.

[www.facebook.com/pages/Everything-Organic-Nursery](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Everything-Organic-Nursery)



## Prefab

Possibly the easiest and fastest to build, there were several Nepali companies offering this method of construction even before the earthquake struck citing the seismic resistant properties of their homes in their websites. Pre-built wall panels can be transported and quickly assembled at the site with corrugated sheets for roofing. It doesn't require water, bricks, cement, iron rods, sand or stone to construct. A typical two-room, one-bathroom home costs Rs 600,000.

[www.prefabnepal.com](http://www.prefabnepal.com)





# Migrants inbound

Many Nepali overseas workers return to help rebuild



PICS: OM ASTHA RAI

OM ASTHA RAI

When he went to work in Malaysia four months ago, Ram Hari Katwal had everything most Nepali men dream of: a house, a wife and two little children.

Today, he has lost almost everything. His wife Hima and one-year-old son Bikram are dead, his house is gone. But his five-year-old Biraj survived.

“I could not see my wife and son before they were cremated,” said Katwal with a distant look. “I wanted to return home immediately but it took me two weeks to get permission from my company.”

Katwal, 26, is now with his son in a temporary shelter made of timber and tin he salvaged from the ruins of his house in Melamchi of Sindhupalchok. He has decided not to return to Malaysia. It was only last year that Katwal built a house with a bank loan, and he went to Malaysia to pay it off.

“I have not paid off my loan yet,” he says. “And now, I have to take more loans out to rebuild my house, the government is never going to give us enough.”

One silver lining about the fact that more than two million Nepalis like Katwal are working abroad means

**FACES OF LOSS:** Krishna Silwal (*top*) paid his own way home from Qatar, but has to rebuild his house in Dhading before he goes back in a month. Biraj Katwal (*below*) now lives with his father who returned from Malaysia after his mother and brother were killed in the collapse of their home in Melamchi.

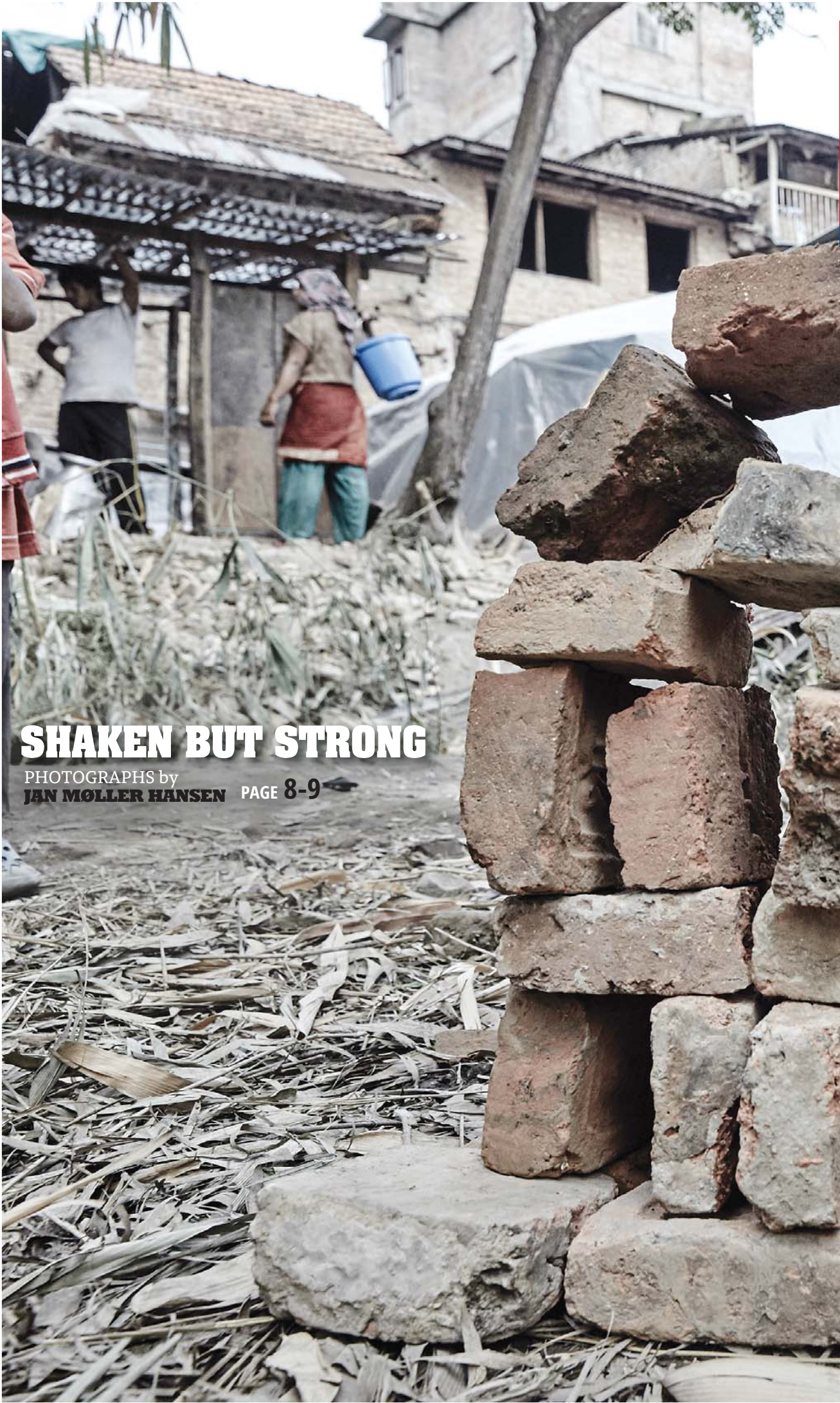
that their families can use the money they send home to rebuild damaged houses. Many Nepali young men also survived because they were not here when the earthquake struck.

However, the absence of able-bodied men in the villages was acutely felt during the rescue of people trapped under the rubble on the first few days after the quake struck. Now, there may be cash but there is a shortage of men for reconstruction.

In village after village, women, children and the elderly are left to fend for themselves. This week at Kathmandu airport, every flight from the gulf and Malaysia was full of migrant workers returning home.

Among them was Krishna Silwal, 40, who had planned to return at Dasain but decided to come early after the earthquake damaged his house in Salang of Dhading district.

His Qatar company finally gave Silwal a 38-day leave, but he had to pay for his own roundtrip ticket. He is using his savings to rebuild the family home. “I want to finish the new



## SHAKEN BUT STRONG

PHOTOGRAPHS by  
JAN MØLLER HANSEN PAGE 8-9

house before I go back, but I don't know if that is possible in a month,” he says.

Silwal says many Nepalis are not coming back because they can't afford air tickets, or can't get permission from employers. After the earthquake, some companies, mostly Malaysian, have offered Nepali migrant workers flight tickets and leave.

Migration expert Ganesh Gurung says remittance money

will make reconstruction easier. “Nepali migrant workers send home nearly Rs 1.5 billion every day and this is the only reason houses damaged by the earthquake will be rebuilt soon,” he says. “Government compensation amount is too little to rebuild.”

Gurung says the earthquake will change the pattern of use of remittances, and lead to a surge in the number of migrant workers.

At present nearly 80 per cent of remittance income is used for household necessities. “Now, a large portion will go for reconstruction of houses,” says Gurung.

Although Sindhupalchok is the district with the highest number of women migrant workers, none of the 14 affected districts are on the list of top districts in terms of migration. But this may now change. 🇳🇵

