The government’s response in the month after the 25 April earthquake has been marked by a lack of a sense of urgency. For a calamity of this scale and scope, the country needed a proactive leadership that would be off and running from Day One. Four weeks later, we are just beginning to see a creaky state machinery trying to organise itself. The hallmarks of our official culture (blame-throwing, playing victim, hogging credit, irrational vengeance at a time of need) are all on full display.

With the need for emergency shelter and food beginning to reach even remote areas, the Ministry of Agriculture should be mobilised to support subsistence farmers who have lost everything with seeds, fertiliser, and basic tools. Most Nepalis don’t expect much from government, so they are doing their best to help themselves, like this woman (left) in Dadhikot of Bhaktapur on Tuesday harvesting wheat near the ruins of her home.

Meanwhile, the Finance Ministry is gearing up for a donor pledging conference in June. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi sent close adviser P K Mishra to Kathmandu this week to scope out the possibility of holding the conference in New Delhi. So far, only a fraction of the money pledged by the international community has been received, with ministers alleging that a lot of the western aid is recycled to their own consultants, and donors are worried about the lack of government accountability.

For the urgency of the task ahead, a 24-hour disaster management Control Room should have been set up by now, the top leadership should be meeting every day to analyse data and decide priorities: what supplies are needed most, where, and how to get it there. Specific mid-term requirements will be clearer with the conclusion of a Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) meeting convened by the National Planning Commission this week.
Living off the land

Nepal’s agriculture was already a disaster even before disaster struck last month

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midst all the post-earthquake we-told-you-so of prophecies fulfilled, there is one stark and brutal truth: this country was already a disaster zone even before disaster struck last month. And nowhere was that more evident than in agriculture.

Eighty per cent of Nepal’s people rely primarily on agriculture; it contributes 40 per cent of the GDP, yet the farming sector had either been neglected, or ruined by flawed policies. Allocation for agriculture in the annual budget had fallen to less than 3.8 per cent – and most of that was earmarked to boost production to subsidise consumables.

Most alarmingly, the state’s investment in the Agricultural GDP (AGDP) has been consistently below 2 per cent since the end of the conflict, a period when farming should have sprung back to reap the peace dividend. Experts consulted said a country needs an optimum of at least 10 per cent investment in AGDP in order to meet the demand of a growing population.

In agriculture in Nepal was already broken, it needed to be fixed even before the earthquake. Young people were moving out of the land, private and public investment in farming was falling, while the onset of the war was destroying the reduced cultivated area, there was fragmentation of landholdings, irrigation was never given the priority it needed, productivity was plummeting. And on top of all that, erratic monsoon and extreme weather events caused by global climate change was starting to make all those prevailing problems worse.

In a country where 83 per cent of farmers still depend on subsistence rain-fed agriculture, Nepal was already in crisis.

Then came the earthquake. The government’s reaction in the past month has been marked by one dominant feature: a singular lack of a sense of urgency. For a calamity of this scale and scope, we needed leadership that would already be on its mark, getting set, and ready to go. Here, one month later, we are just beginning to see a creak state machinery trying to organise itself for relief delivery.

It’s like the PMD is swimming in honey, the bureaucracy camping out in tents take ages to decide anything and when it does the decisions are ill-considered and ad hoc. Instead of rushing relief supplies through customs, officials find excuses every step of the way to delay clearances. Most government pronouncements have been counterintuitive and counterproductive (Prime Minister Relief Fund asking rescuers to leave prematurely, customs duty on relief goods, a ban on new houses when shelter is the prime need) or have been deadly blunders (the Army brass refusing to allow RAF Chinook heavy-lift helicopters to punish the UK government for the arrest of Col Kumar Lama).

To be sure, we have seen some bright spots in the Ministry of Health, district hospitals, the role played by state broadcasters in disseminating accurate information and refraining rumours, the urgency displayed by security forces in search, rescue and relief.

However, just when it should have sprung into action, the Ministry of Agriculture is in deep slumber. Emergency food aid has been handled reasonably well by first responders, including some local administrations, UN agencies like

REBUILDING NEPAL
Reconstruction needs careful planning and balancing of short-term needs against long-term sustainability of the natural environment and ecosystems. (‘Homeless in Nepal’, Editorial, #758). We hope important decisions will be made by qualified and thoughtful people both from within Nepal and the international donor/aid community, and not by people with short-term vested interests.

A Nepali

A Nepali needs rich, educated and intelligent citizens living abroad, to come back and contribute in rebuilding (‘The four-fold path’, Pradumna Rana, #758). The country needs all the support it can get from its citizens overseas.

Rudra Bahadur Thapa

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improved governance cannot be achieved overnight. Drafting of a new constitution and holding local elections is the need of the hour.

Yogesh

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Very timely, relevant and to the point article urging caution about going to such extreme lengths to build RCC buildings (‘A future concrete future’, Sonia Awale, #758). Thank you, Nepal Times for being ahead of the curve on earthquake reporting.

Jens

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These are all great ideas on reconstruction, however, the main issue is the need for Sonia Awale writes has been the lack of compliance of our building codes. If the government ensures compliance, most buildings in the valley will have to be torn down or renovated. Even these alternatives to RCC buildings will have to be tested extensively before being allowed to be adopted in any mass scale.

Nam

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Small, aesthetically-pleasing houses with gardens should replace tacky high-rise buildings. This is also what has allowed the masculinist state to valorise the male migrants’ contribution while acting as a benevolent protector of female migrants whose rights to become equal economic agents are, time and again, denied.

R Rai

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In Nepal it takes three generations to build a house (‘Migrants inbound’, Om Astha Rai, #758). Then, every 70 plus years, Mother Nature pulls it down, turning it into a pile of rubble. This vicious cycle has been taking place for centuries in Nepal, but we have yet to learn the lesson of mitigating the risk. When will we start building houses that are environmentally sound and earthquake proof?

Braveheart

A

It’s high time we stopped talking about remittances in terms of statistics (‘Quarter of the country’s GDP’, etc). This gives a false and dangerous sense of optimism and security on

the potential of remittances. Let’s stop providing such over-optimistic accounts of remittances because at an individual level the migrants’ earnings are mostly spent on day-to-day expenses, repayment of loans, health and education. There are few migrants who have enough savings to rebuild a house, most are indebted migrants who are going to be even more vulnerable while working abroad. Saying that ‘remittance money will make reconstruction easier’ dehumanises their work and removes state responsibility. Such glorification is also what has allowed the masculinist state to valorise the male migrants’ contribution while acting as a benevolent protector of female migrants whose rights to become equal economic agents are, time and again, denied.

123Now!

A

Very in-depth write-up (‘Lessons from Sichuan’, Kunda Dixit, #758). This must be the core concept of our cabinet too.

Biret Gautam

A

Bibeksheel Nepal an alternative political force? Hardy, (‘Bibeksheel Dolger’ #758). More like a feel good club for the pseudo-left leaning liberal elite and middle-class youth of Kathmandu. We know the type: The Yellow House going, exp-oriented types who have sold their souls to INGOs and neo-liberal ideas of the role of the individual and the state. What is their political ideology? Where do they stand on issues that really matter to the common Nepali? Don’t want to sound too negative because they are doing a great job in providing relief to the victims of the earthquake, but this article reads more like a sponsored ad than anything else.

Gurudev

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Thank you for shining a light on Bibeksheel Nepal, the party will absolutely have my vote in the next election. All current leaders of the three parties are obsolete and have been proven useless. Gone are the days when politicians’ rose up the ranks within their parties by the number of times and duration they spent in jail. Nepal has changed now and so must the political system. Why should only those who wasted their lives and spent a lifetime chasing and pleasing the state members be allowed to run for office? We need bright young capable leaders like those in Bibeksheel Nepal.

Bairagi Khukuri

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If we free our political system from the grasps of these senile narcissists, we can never move forward no matter what type of political system we adopt.
Path to recovery

Outside help is much appreciated, but earthquake survivors are not holding their breath

Nearby, the district CA member Man Bahadur, one of the last villagers had voted for, was busy taking pictures of himself distributing relief supplies. He had no time for the patients. Luckily, a group of volunteers including Aadur Rana and Shishen Neupane Man Bahadur to the Chhatrapati Clinic in Kathmandu, which is treating him free of cost.

“Let my legs heal, I am going back to rebuild not just my house but my neighbours’ as well,” he said with a wide smile.

Semendo Tamang from Gorkha, who is a truck driver and had walked for hours to get supplies and medicines for her injured father-in-law and some big men had tried to get in a larger share and Tamang looked worried she would have to go back empty-handed. A few policemen with sticks were hardly a match for the goons. Things started getting ugly so the survivors were locked up in a school till the next morning. It was getting dark, and Tamang decided to spend the night here.

In the past weeks, everyone I met in remote areas like Sindhupalchok and Nuwakot said the same thing: we want temporary houses that will withstand the rains and the winter. We are doing mostly okay with food. Indeed, their priority is not to rebuild their homes and move on, but to get food and resources to invest in the future, in rebuilding the national economy back on track at the earliest.

The Malaysian doctors were impressed by the difference in the attitude of the patients. “I've never met such people — they want to contribute towards the reconstruction of the country,” said Dr Muthiah, the medical director of the clinic.

By the way

Anurag Acharya

NUWAKOT – Damay Sherpa has made dozens of trips from his hard-to-reach village to the town, on roads ravaged by landslides bringing in vital supplies.

No, he is not an elected village council member, or a relief worker. Sherpa is a truck driver who used to ferry cement and bricks for building houses in Kathmandu, but now hauls emergency supplies including zinc sheets to rebuild not just his own house, but for those of his neighbours as well.

More than 50 people were killed last month when buildings collapsed in Gauskharka, the villagers buried them together on a slope outside the village.

“There is no time to mourn because the survivors have to live,” says Sherpa, “we have to salvage what is left and rebuild to survive the monsoon and the coming winter.”

The landslides from the 12 May aftershock brought down huge boulders cutting off Gauskharka and leaving embankments and fortresses with relief stranded. But Damay takes his 4WD down to the Tadi River and drives his truck through the roaring torrent to the other side, carrying a few people who need medical attention.

The truck also carries 30 bundles of zinc roofing and tarpaulin sheets with money collected by people from Gauskharka living and working in Kathmandu, Korea, Israel, and the US.

“We have enough to eat. We just need some help building houses,” he says, skillfully negotiating the boulders by the river to drop me off.

“I am not charging for this. There will be a time to make money later.”

Across the river in Samundtar, Ram Chandra Thapa and Bhimsen Timilsena are busy helping Sichumum Tamang and his family of 20. They lost their home and salvaged her roof. She is single and doesn’t have family, so the community is helping her.

In village after village, we meet people struggling to rebuild their lives and move on. “Unlike in cities, we build our own houses, and we help each other,” said Timilsena, who says their immediate need is for zinc sheets, hammers and nails.

It was late in the afternoon when three trucks full of relief materials including tents, food and medical supplies, such brought by Maiti Nepal volunteers, a team of Malaysian medical doctors and a group of volunteer students reached Raibushi. Villagers had been waiting since morning and they lined up for the supplies.

The Malaysian team set up its medical camp and immediately started treating patients with broken bones, deep cuts and bruises. A nine-year-old boy had walked hours to get medicines for his mother, who was injured and could not walk. The doctors quickly trained him how to apply dressing and gave him some painkillers.

It’s not just earthquake injuries being treated. In Man Bahadur, Tamang, 68, had been bitten by a leech last year and the wound was infected and the gangrene was spreading up his leg. After basic dressing, the Malaysian doctors advised him to get to a hospital immediately otherwise he may lose his leg.

The El Nino effect is supposed to delay the monsoon this year and precipitation is forecast to be 60 per cent below normal in Central Nepal. This will reduce the impact of landslides, but is going to hit productivity, especially of subsistence farmers without irrigation. The mountains of central Nepal are unstable all the shaking, and the monsoon this year is bound to trigger deadly landslides causing more destruction and blocking highways yet again.

Access to markets for cash crops will be disrupted. causing more destruction and blocking highways yet again.

The government doesn’t need donor fatigue to hinder the rebuilding effort. Farmers get the seeds and fertiliser on time, encourage job creation at home to attract overseas workers back, and prepare for the autumn trekking season. There is no harm in holding a donor’s conference to raise immediate money in aid, but the only way to ensure a sustained flow of resources is to get the national economy back on track at the earliest.

Rebuilding a ravaged country is a long-term national project, which requires committed mobilisation from within. Else, luckier worst hit areas have come together putting aside personal differences, there is no reason why the polarised politics of Nepal cannot do the same in this hour of need. If a national government helps to resolve impeding distractions, so be it.

Outside help is much appreciated, but earthquake survivors are not holding their breath.
Physically challenged again

The 25 April earthquake has left most of Central Nepal in shambles. Many people have lost their families, friends and loved ones, entire villages have been destroyed. We are slowly starting to hear about the psychological impact the incident had on survivors. But one group that hasn't received much attention are the disabled.

"We can't help people to restructure... we are not thinking how they can live..." says Acharya Shrestha of HeNN USA. "We expect it to dip as international media attention wanes, but we will be here as long as Nepal needs help to rebuild." The Help Nepal Network was set up in 1999 in London and has been fundraising among the Nepali diaspora and friends of Nepal to help education and health projects through campaigns like its “$1 a Month”. But it has been the earthquake that has brought hefty cash donations.

"We have managed to leverage the social media to reach Nepalis across the world, and that response has been truly staggering," says Abhay Shrestha of HeNN USA. "We expect it to dip as international media attention wanes, but we will be here as long as Nepal needs help to rebuild."

The Help Nepal’s Kathmandu office has had to move twice after the two earthquakes damaged buildings. "It was a nightmare," says, and is now housed in tents pitched in a family's kitchen garden. The place is a hive of activity with volunteers, survivors, and HeNN staff all rushing out supplies to villages most in need. Lata Ghimire who looks after health issues is briefing a group of MBBS students who are volunteering to go to a shelter in Bhaktapur. She then interviews villagers from Rasuwa to assess the needs.

"There are 1,400 in your village, not everyone is sick, right?" Ghimire asks a survivor. "How many have open wounds? How many have fever? Is there a health assistant?" She notes all this down to decide what kind of medicines and how much to hand out.

Most people at the centre this week seeking relief supplies heard about HeNN from founder president Rabindra Mahata’s Facebook account which has nearly 400,000 followers. After identifying a local volunteer youth group or partner, HeNN works with them to transport and distribute supplies to the neediest in the affected village.

"Social networking has been a great help in spreading the message both in the diaspora as well as among Nepalis affected by the earthquake," says Mishra, the organisation and coordinator Bhojraj Shrestha are themselves working to ensure shelter for other disabled people.

"We need disabled-friendly safe houses because tarpaulin sheets won’t protect us from the rain. Those paralysed due to spinal cord injuries can’t sleep on mattresses, they need proper beds," says Acharya.

"The tents provided by China’s Red Cross Society look sturdy from the outside but don’t have any of the amenities that Acharya mentioned. At a time when social media is flooded with pictures of people giving handouts of instant noodle cartons, the people at the shelter in Jawalakhel haven’t received much. Unlike able-bodied individuals, they can’t push through crowds or fight for their share. Even though they have their own challenges to face, people like Acharya are more worried about those who have been recently disabled by the earthquake.

Says Acharya, "The number of people paralysed due to spinal cord injuries, I heard, has surpassed 400, I can’t imagine how many more people are disabled."
SANJIV SHRESTHA
IN NEW YORK

On 27 February 2010, Chile suffered massive devastation after being struck by an 8.8 magnitude earthquake. What followed was quick and effective recovery that didn’t just address the devastation but also boosted the economy of the South American country.

In Leadership Dispatches: Chile’s Extraordinary Comeback from Disaster authors Michael Useem, Howard Kunreuther and Erwan Michel-Kerjan pin it down to governance and leadership. The authors attribute Chile’s success to able national leadership (technocratic, rules-based and transparent) and strong institutions for risk readiness (insurance, building code).

For Nepal, the conclusions are obvious and clear. The challenge is to overcome a culture built on inertia and turn it into a problem-solving mechanism.

Emphasise deliberative strategy thinking. During low-probability, high-consequence events leadership based on intuition is not effective. Such situations require listening to probability, high-consequence strategic thinking.

Work with a long-term vision. Short-term rebuilding efforts seem urgent but it is imperative to use the rebuilding opportunity to plan ahead. In Chile, even though one highway had four lanes, damaged bridges were rebuilt with six lanes.

Develop institutional practice. How can we design standards (building codes) that when coupled with market-based policies (insurance) promise to reduce losses from future disasters, making the country more resilient physically and economically? It may not be practical to require adherence to certain minimal standards so that we are better prepared when the next disaster strikes.

We must as a nation engrain deliberate decision making and accountability in our psyche. We must have proper economic incentives in place to encourage adherence to certain minimal standards so that we are better prepared when the next disaster strikes.

**Communication relief**: Solo Bank has donated Rs 2 million to the Prime Minister’s Disaster Relief Fund. The internet service provider had also offered free data service following the quake in various affected areas through its Emergency Telecommunication Cluster (ETC).

**Employees help**: Employees of Berger Jenson and Nicholson Nepal contributed a portion of their salaries to buy relief materials for earthquake victims. Tarpaulins and food were provided to 160 families of Sunabesiyak municipality last week.

**Medical shelter**: Achar Chaudhary Foundation has handed over 11,600 temporary medical shades to the Nepal Army. These shades will be used to treat the people who are in need of medical facilities at the army grounds in Tundikhel.

**Food and shelter first**: HIMAL Power has decided to provide relief packages worth more than Rs 9.3 million to earthquake affected villages. The relief support will be distributed throughout each District Relief Fund of Dolakha and Ramechhap districts. The company is currently in collaboration with its parent organisation, Stockkraft, to supply tarpaulins, blankets, food materials and medicines.

**Zero-fee**: Western Union has extended its no-fee money transfer transaction program till 31 May, enabling people abroad to send money to Nepal from participating Western Union Agent locations at zero charge. Online consumers will need to use the promotion code NEPAL RELIEF 2015.

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Growing back
Subsistence farmers in the disaster zone need help to grow food again

SONIA AWALE

S ok Bahadur Lama of Rayale village of Kavre isn’t too worried about food, like many in this district east of Kathmandu, he is more concerned about finding shelter from the rain at night. A heap of bricks and timber is all that remains of his house and cowshed.

In a familiar sight across the 15 districts ravaged by the earthquakes of 25 April and 12 May, Lama and his family are busy weeding their corn fields, harvesting potatoes and watering the cabbage and cucumber patch right next to their ruined home and tarp shelters. The rice seedlings are waiting for the rain for transplantation.

“We were lucky all of us survived, and at least we have a plastic sheet over our heads,” says Lama, who works as a driver in Kathmandu. “We are planting crops out of necessity to grow food, but our hearts are not in it.”

Thousands of farmers have lost relatives, all their livestock, seeds, and food stores. Less fortunate families need emergency food aid, shelter, as well as rice seeds for the planting season which is only three weeks away. With families and homes gone, many are too disturbed to turn their minds to farming. Because these districts also have a high out-migration rate, there are fewer helping hands in the farms and for reconstructing homes.

“Livelihoods have been disrupted,” said Hari Dalal, former secretary at the Ministry of Agriculture, who is now with the Nepal Development Research Institute. “Families have lost the motivation to farm after what they have been through.”

The loss of livestock means there aren’t enough animals to till the fields, milk production has plummeted in districts like Kavre where the dairy industry was the mainstay of the economy. With the livestock gone, there isn’t enough manure for the fields. Even if agriculture is revived, experts say, there will be a decline in productivity. Subsistence farmers who depend on rain-fed agriculture are going to be hit hardest, especially if the rains this year are late, as predicted.

Despite the calamity and devastation, farmers are hardwired to farm because they instinctively know growing food is survival. In Dolakha Bazaur, which suffered massive destruction in the 12 May aftershock, Pramila Shrestha rummages inside the ruins of her home to try to retrieve the family’s seed store (see box), the runs out as another aftershock hits. Some of the plastic containers are crushed, but she is happy to recover the rice seeds.

Dhading, Kavre and Sindhupalchok are important sources of vegetables for Kathmandu. Although demand in the capital has gone down because 1.2 million people left after the earthquake, farmers are readying to sell vegetables again to earn money. Flights from the Gulf and Malaysia are full of Nepali migrant workers coming back, many of whom have taken unpaid leave and bought their own plane tickets home to help rebuild and help plant paddy.

Since the 15 most affected districts are not food surplus areas except for dairy and vegetables, the impact on Nepal’s total agriculture production is not going to be very big. The districts around Kathmandu account for 10 per cent of Nepal’s total rice production and 19 per cent of the corn. The Ministry of Agriculture estimates that the damage to agriculture from the earthquakes is Rs 15 billion. Still, it is a race against time to get food and seeds to farmers before monsoon begins in mid-June. Some families need simple things like metal containers to store their potato and corn harvests, or agricultural tools.

In the medium term, existing government agricultural research stations in Muide of Sindhupalchok and Jiri of Dolakha could be the hubs to get agriculture extension workers to the field. Farmers will need help to diversify to fruit farming, agro-forestry and high-value crops.

Said Dalal: “This crisis gives us the opportunity to revamp our agriculture policy. The 15 districts could serve as models for the rest of the country.”

The pain of the living

When the earth started shaking, Kancha Pakhrin was in his home in the remote village of Thangnakot of Sindhupalchok. His two-month and two-year-old sons, and 80-year-old partially blind mother were inside the house.

Kachan was weeding his cornfield, and saw his wife, Chameli, rush into the house to save their boys. The house collapsed on her in a cloud of dust.

Chameli was later found dead amidst the ruins while still holding her son tightly in her arms. The baby died 17 days later, possibly due to malnourishment and lack of care. Kancha’s mother broke her leg, but managed to save the older boy.

Among Kancha’s three other children, Kirin is studying in Delhi, his mother hasn’t been able to go to hospital to get her broken leg treated even though helicopters fly overhead.

WE ARE FAMILY: Kancha Pakhrin lost his wife and two-month-old baby when his home in Sindhupalchok collapsed in the earthquake last month. His worry now is how to feed and educate those still living, including his mother (at bed) who broke her leg and still hasn’t got treatment.

all the time.

Two-year-old Jivan keeps asking Kancha where his mother is, as does his other son, Sandip. “What do I tell them?” Kancha asks with a vacant look.

Two-year-old Jivan keeps asking Kancha where his mother is, as does his other son, Sandip. “What do I tell them?” Kancha asks with a vacant look.

“Everything is buried,” said Pramila (pic, left) who was preparing to take her Grade 11 exam before the earthquake, and now has constant headaches and is running a fever.

Subsistence farmers who depend on rain-fed agriculture are going to be hit hardest, especially if the rains this year are late, as predicted.

Despite the calamity and devastation, farmers are hardwired to farm because they instinctively know growing food is survival. In Dolakha Bazaur, which suffered massive destruction in the 12 May aftershock, Pramila Shrestha rummages inside the ruins of her home to try to retrieve the family’s seed store (see box), the runs out as another aftershock hits. Some of the plastic containers are crushed, but she is happy to recover the rice seeds.

The historical town of Dolakha Bazaur was devastated in the earthquake. Pramila Shrestha, 17, lived in a house here which was destroyed, and has been living in a tent with 25 members of seven families. The upper floor collapsed, but since the roof and walls are intact no one has helped the Shresthas. The kitchen fell on the storeroom below, and all the family’s belongings, food and seeds for the planting season are buried underneath. “I couldn’t even buy a sanitary pad because we had no money,” said Pramila (pic, left) who was preparing to take her Grade 11 exam before the earthquake, and now has constant headaches and is running a fever.

**CO**
Tourism is down, but not out
The normally busy Thamel intersection wears a deserted look during what should be peak tourist season

OM ASTHA RAI

Besides the death and destruction, last month’s earthquake has dealt the most devastating blow to Nepal’s tourism industry. Hotels are damaged, trekking routes have been wiped out, and Kathmandu’s World Heritage sites lie in ruins.

In the first few weeks after the disaster, flights out of Nepal were full of tourists, then came the cancellations of booking, not just for May but for the rest of the year. Many hotels in Thamel have zero occupancy, although some of the bigger hotels have relief workers, aid agency representatives and crew of rescue flights.

Despite this, tourism entrepreneurs, experts and officials believe that the impact of the Gorkha Earthquake will not be long-term, and such is the draw of Nepal, its mountains and people that tourists will start coming back from the autumn season.

In fact, this newspaper has started a social media campaign #VisitNepalAutumn2015, advising those who want to help Nepal to come here, go on long treks, use homestays and help create jobs.

After the earthquake, several countries warned their citizens not to visit this country except if they were involved in rescue and relief. Today, Thamel wears a deserted look, the Everest Trail and other trekking routes are abandoned, and even Pokhara, where there wasn’t much damage, is largely empty.

Hotel owners, trekking companies and travel agents say tourism may actually start picking up even during the monsoon, since that is the ideal time to visit Manang, Mustang and Dolpo, which are in the Himalayan rainshadow. Tibet-bound transit tourists would also be making stopovers, as in previous years.

“Nepal has a niche adventure tourism market and that category of visitors will not be deterred for long,” says Yogendra Shakya of the Hotel Association of Nepal (HAN). “We just need to spread the word that our infrastructure is intact and ready before the autumn season.”

But he admits that there will still be residual hesitancy about visiting Nepal. “No matter how well we promote Nepal’s tourism and say all is well here, they will still have their doubts,” he says, stressing on the need for a creative promotion strategy. “For example, this would be the time for our prime minister to invite Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to visit Janakpur, Lambini and Muktinath where he could not go last time,” Shakya says. “It would send a strong message to Indian pilgrim tourists and the world that Nepal is open for business.”

The international community has gone out of its way to help Nepal, and tourism entrepreneurs say that could be Nepal’s strongest selling point. We just need to convert that goodwill into a willingness to visit.

The government can actively promote trekking areas of the country not affected by the earthquake, pilgrimages, and conference tourism to get the industry back on its feet. “Tourists should not be worried about Nepal, in a few months the hotels and infrastructure will all be restored,” says former HAN president, Shyam Lal Kakshapati. In fact, 90 per cent of the hotels are not damaged, and many that are can be repaired and retrofitted.

A government committee has inspected 15 hotel buildings, and only one of the wings of the Kathmandu Guest House in Thamel has a red sticker. All five-star hotels in the capital have got safe green stickers.

Amar Shakya, a member of the committee, says inspection was halted after the 12 May aftershock and will resume. “Our preliminary inspection shows most hotel buildings have not suffered structural damage,” he says.

The government has already formed a Tourism Recovery Committee in partnership with HAN and Trekking Agencies Association of Nepal (TAAN) to repair damaged trekking routes, heritage sites and promote safe tourism destinations.

“Rebuilding the nation will automatically help revive tourism,” says Sangita Shrestha of Dwarka’s Hotel, which has opened a camp in Kathmandu for 326 displaced people from Sindhupalchok. The hotel is designing special promotions for visitors from South Asia.

The earthquake was just the latest in a series of disasters to hit Nepal. Last year’s Everest avalanche killed 16 climbers, and the Amarpurna glacier in October left 80 people dead including foreign trekkers.

Despite this, a record number of tourists visited Nepal in 2014, boosted by an influx of visitors from China and India. Tourism has a capacity to heal itself, the only question is how will the Nepal Tourism Board and the government deal with the necessary international promotion to bring visitors back in 2015 and beyond.

Many tourists from Nepal boarded repatriation planes after 25 April, but a few can still be seen around deserted Thamel and Patan Durbar Square.

Aya Speer arrived in Nepal on 21 April with her Brazilian friend, Tago Ferreira. The two wanted to tour the country but after the earthquake have been busy helping people affected by the disaster. They were joined by Dutch Rinke de Jong in their efforts. The three collected funds from friends back home and donated the money to monks providing relief materials to Lamjung and Rameua.

Like them, Ricky Smith and Carl Nickel (pic) also put their tour on hold after the earthquake. “We raised money for the Red Cross and we accompanied them on some relief missions in Pokhara,” said Nickel.

Back in Kathmandu, they have gone sightseeing, and found the valley hasn’t lost everything. “I will definitely recommend friends to visit Nepal,” Smith told us, “as I think tourism is an important source of income for the locals.”

Some trekkers even advanced their plans to come to the country. Marc Van Wynsberghe who had planned to fly to Nepal end of May, brought forward his flight to support friends here.

After 10 days in Kathmandu Valley, Van Wynsberghe regrets not being able to see the beautiful monuments that were destroyed in the quake. “The authorities in Nepal should communicate on destinations that are safe and still practicable for tourism,” he said.

Some tourism professionals understood the need of rethinking their strategy in Nepal. Ama De Beauf, director of Shanti Travel, a tour operator in India, said they are focusing on destinations that haven’t been hit by the earthquake like Dolpo, Mustang and Kanchenjunga. “We are also orienting on more immersive programs where tourists share with local people,” he added.

Even if some trekkers are conscious of the importance of tourism, it seems that they don’t always have the last decision. Emilie Pascal, a Mauritian student in France, had booked her ticket to Nepal for August.

“After the earthquake, my insurance company informed me they weren’t insuring my trip because of the high risks,” she told Nepal Times.

Arya Shrestha, director of Trekking Adventures in New Zealand which sends 200 clients to Nepal annually, “We are worried that media coverage might dissuade trekkers. ‘TV in New Zealand only shows the worse-hit areas,’” she said.

“But a lot of places are still intact and devastated areas too. We are still in touch with our porters in Nepal and they are safe,” Shrestha added.

Sirmai Le Bran, “Our role is also to tell our customers on one thing are stabilized, tourism will have a really positive impact for the people of Nepal,” Stiphone Hui
**Preparedness saved lives**

When Bijaya Bahadur Mali (pic, above) of Chhatrapati Free Clinic (CFC) in Kathmandu decided to retrofit the building three years ago, many called him “mad” for spending so much money on an old structure. The single-storey clinic built in 1962 added three floors when 1985. But because it was built in 1962 added three floors when retrofitted the building didn’t suffer a single crack in the 25 April earthquake and the 7.3 magnitude aftershock on 12 May.

“Those who called me crazy are now seeking shelter in the grounds of the clinic,” says Mali. The clinic was able to treat hundreds of people injured in the earthquake and provided shelter to many who lost their homes as per an earthquake preparedness plan drawn up in 2005. It was a part of that plan to retrofit the building to make it earthquake-resistant at a cost of Rs 5.2 million.

With support from the National Society of Earthquake Technology (NSET), the clinic also trained 200 local youth and 600 community members in rescue work in case of a big earthquake. They ended up saving many lives last month. Mali has been pushing retrofitting all old and weak hospital buildings across the country. But he says political leaders and government authorities were not receptive to the idea of earthquake preparedness.

“The earthquake struck when a Constituent Assembly session was going on and all political leaders were there,” he says. “But I don’t think they have learnt their lesson yet. It wasn’t the earthquake that killed people but the indifference of our politicians.”

Two years ago Mali built an earthquake-resistant house for himself. He says, “If your damaged house can be retrofitted by spending 40 per cent of the cost of building a new one, then retrofitting is a wise idea.”

**Bungamati Kumari in quake shelter**

The Living Goddess of Bungamati, seven-year-old Smriti Bajracharya, has been living in a shelter in her hometown on the southern outskirts of Kathmandu Valley that was devastated in the 25 April earthquake.

The Kumari lives with her parents, relatives and friends in a courtyard that houses 200 people who have lost their homes. “She just sat there through the tremors when the first earthquake hit and she wasn’t the least bit afraid,” said the Kumari’s father, Shanthik Bajracharya who grabbed her and took her outside. During the aftershock on 12 May, Smriti Bajracharya was playing on a toy flute and kept on doing so despite the shaking which brought down the buildings that were weakened during the first quake.

The historic town of Bungamati was destroyed in the quakes, with both residential buildings and the main temple of Machhendranath damaged or brought down. Although the chariot of the naibod is intact in Sainbu, the temple was completely destroyed.

Meanwhile, Smriti started going back to Grade Two in her school Tritranta Cooperative School in Bungamati.

**ANURAG ACHARVA in SANKHU**

Standing over the rubble of her house Sarita Malla points out to her husband a barely visible piece of furniture buried underneath a pile of bricks. He moves to the spot, starts digging with a shovel and after few minutes pulls out a small tea table.

Three weeks after the devastating earthquake with no organised help reaching this town 18km east of Kathmandu, Sankhu residents are fending for themselves, salvaging every bit of useful item from the debris of their home.

Over 150 people were killed in this old Newar settlement, and although all the missing have now been recovered, some like Samu Kaji Dangol, believe there are still bodies under the rubble.

“It was a Saturday and there were quite a few door-to-door salesmen, repair man who had come from the city,” says Dangol. Further ahead, Surendra Shrestha, has managed to dig out a cabinet and is moving it to his tent with a friend. Nearby, an elderly woman is sifting through the ruins of a house, and turns away when she sees people approaching.

The house belonged to Surej Shrestha whose entire family was buried under the rubble when the house collapsed. Only Surej and his father Purma Bahadur survived. They now live in a shack by the banks of Shali River. Tara Shrestha considers herself lucky to have escaped unhurt. She saved life by jumping off the third floor of her house. Although she feels blessed...
The 25 April earthquake and the powerful aftershock on 12 May collectively damaged 490 monuments, 125 of which were completely destroyed. The Department of Archaeology (DoA) has been surveying affected sites to see which monuments need the quickest reinforcement.

Artist Joy Lynn Davis, known for her research on Nepal’s stolen sculptures, came up with the idea of mobilizing volunteers to contribute to data collection. Davis got in touch with Pabhas Pahkhar of Kathmandu Living Labs who developed a mobile app called KLL Collect that lets users enter information such as name, location and condition of the monument onto a common database.

The app is enabled with geolocation and users can upload up to five pictures of damaged monuments. The inputs go to a database, accessible by DoA and UNESCO Nepal. “These are preliminary information that will help DoA know which experts are needed at the sites documented,” says Davis. The app can be downloaded on any smartphone (Android, iOS, Windows Phone).

So far more than 100 volunteers have participated in the training on the use of the app conducted by Davis. The artist explains the technical aspects of the app, and also gives advises to ensure that the most thorough information is entered.

Davis says another objective is to encourage users to enter information on heritage sites outside Kathmandu. “Much of the focus tends to be on heritage sites outside of Kathmandu. Much of the focus tends to be on heritage sites inside the valley, our message is no temple or stupa is too small or insignificant,” she says.

Suresh Shrestha, head of DoA’s World Heritage Section, says: “The use of KLL Collect by volunteers will help us save time.”

Shrestha also intends to train the staff at DoA to use the app. “This would ensure a better coordination in the data collection as all information will be sent to one database,” he adds.

Nipuna Shrestha, who works at the department of culture at UNESCO Nepal, also believes that making KLL Collect accessible to larger number of people will ensure efficiency. “Much of the heritage sites are also involved in assessing the monuments,” she says. “It is better to centralize all these efforts towards one database.”

So far, KLL Collect’s database has received close to 1000 entries. Davis expects this number to rise with new volunteers joining.

“We need more volunteers — preferably with backgrounds in engineering, history, cultural studies and who speak either Nepali or Newari,” she says.

Interested volunteers can contact 9818990583

NO MORE NIGHTMARES: Pasang, 4, recovers at the hospital after suffering bruises from the earthquake. She has been camping under a borrowed plastic sheet with three other families.

She considers herself to be extremely lucky because none of her five children were hurt. Her three sons and two daughters take turns to stay with her at the hospital.

“I want to read books but it’s hard with my broken arm. I remember my left arm was dangling like a rope by my waist when I stood up,” says Dhanmaya.

Dhanmaya hopes to be back on the sidewalk with her little shop. She knows that she needs to recover first but also that it will pass like all difficult times do.

Also in the ward is Pasang. She is touching the cut on her face while standing next to a hospital bed. The cut isn’t from the earthquake, but from walking into a wall in the hospital. She is accompanying her four-year-old grandson, Nischal (pic, above), who fell down and broke his leg during the earthquake in their home in Sindhuli.

Nischal had started waking up in the midst of deep sleep shouting “Ayo, ayo”, but he does not do it much anymore. “He has started peeing in bed like his eight-month-old little sister,” says Pasang. “We will just have to train both the brother and sister together again.”

Nischal is playing with his toy gun with a big smile on his face as he learned the names of sea creatures. Today he learned to say ‘whale machha’.

The rich and powerful in the area managed to get tents from Chinese and Korean relief workers,” says Hiru Devi Dangol (pic, left) and breaks down. Dangol’s family has been camping under a borrowed plastic sheet with three other families. Only a small team of Canadian relief workers remain in the area, clearing a stone spout so that people in the tents have drinking water.

“All credit to the Nepal Army guys who located the spur under the debris,” says Major Corporal Matthew Griffin.

The main access into the town, which had been cleared by Nepal Army personnel was again locked up, with a house that had been damaged in the earlier quake collapsed following the 12 May aftershock.

So near to the capital, and yet so far, the people of Sankhu are still in a daze, waiting for emergency relief. They haven’t even started thinking about rebuilding their homes.
The Ranas ruled Nepal for just over a century, and when the oligarchy was overthrown in 1951, their lavish palaces in Kathmandu Valley were what remained. Now, after last month’s earthquake even those monuments of a bygone era have been damaged, some irreparably. Rana prime ministers like Jang Bahadur and Chandra Shumshere took Newar craftsmen with them to Britain and France, and returned to replicate the palaces they saw there in a unique hybrid of Nepali, European and Indian architecture, which has since become a part of Kathmandu’s heritage.

Many of these buildings came down in the 1934 earthquake and were rebuilt, others were turned into government offices after the Rana overthrow, others were demolished by owners and turned into libraries, museums, hotels and heritage complexes. The recent 7.8 magnitude earthquake on 25 April and its aftershocks have seriously damaged these grand stucco palaces. Many of the mud-mortar brick and lime plaster construction could not withstand the severe shaking, the government has yet to do an inventory of the destruction.

“Many of the older buildings have been given red or yellow stickers,” said Padam Kumar Mainalee of the Ministry of Urban Development. There has been serious damage to Singha Darbar, once said to be the biggest private residence in Asia, which was converted into the central government secretariat in the 1950s. Singha Darbar was destroyed in a fire in 1973 with only the facade intact, and the rest of the palace was reconstructed in the original design. Last month’s quake seriously damaged both the facade, the Prime Minister’s Office and Defence Ministry rebuilt after the fire. Singha Darbar now has a red sticker, and the PMO has shifted to Baluwatar. Another former Rana palace, the Harithar Bhawan complex in Pulchowk that houses the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), Nepal National Library and the Departments of Agriculture and Livestock Services also got a red sticker. The building had been declared seismically unsafe eight years ago, according to Human Rights Commissioner Sudip Parhak.

Sita Mahal in Naxal built by Bhim Shumshere, which houses the Bal Mandir orphanage and the Nepal Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) has also been declared unsafe. The front face of the building has been badly damaged and the right wing has completely collapsed.

“There is just too much damage, this building will have to be torn down and rebuilt from the foundation up,” said NAFA’s Nava Raj Bhatta. While the children of Bal Mandir have been moved to another shelter, the NAFA employees have been working from the garage. Also awarded a red sticker is Babar Mahal, the former palace turned into the Department of Roads and Office of Auditor General. The building suffered more damage in the 12 May aftershock than in the main quake. Even the Babar Mahal Revisted Complex has sustained some damage, although it is limited because it is a renovated and restored structure. Babahur Bhanvan also known as Char Burja, which formerly housed Nepal’s first luxury hotel (Royal Hotel) has a yellow sticker. The Office of Vice President and the Election Commission may have to move because the rear of the building has been heavily damaged with cracks on the ceilings and walls.

Kaiser Mahal in Kantipath also got a yellow sticker and the famous library of Field Marshal Kaiser Shumshere Rana, the Department of Money Laundering Investigation and the UNESCO Secretariat may all have to relocate while repairs are made. “The building has different roofs for different sections, and they are all damaged and have sprung leaks,” said Sunil Kumar Shrestha of Kaiser Library.

While structural damage of historic buildings is worrying, the preservation of historical documents, books and official records is also a concern as monsoon approaches. Documents in the Department of Civil Personnel Records, books in the Kaiser Library and the paintings at NAFA all have to be salvaged. The Election Commission has shifted their data from the main building to the Electoral Education and Information Center and day to day records and master records of the Department of Roads have been recovered. The office is still trying to salvage blueprints of bridges, roads, highways and other infrastructure.
**David Seddon**

Exactly a hundred years ago in May 1915 the allied forces, bolstered by reinforcements from the Indian 29th Brigade, which included three Nepali Gurkha battalions, clustered on the beaches of Gallipoli in Turkey and launched an assault on the heights above. This is the second in a series of *New Zealand Times* running in memory of the Nezilians who fought and died in this disastrous campaign. It is part of David Seddon’s forthcoming book, *Gallipoli, the Gurkhas and the Great War*.

Reinforcements arrive – Early May 1915

After the initial landings and encounters with the defending Ottoman forces towards the end of April 1915, the Allies on the beaches at Gallipoli were significantly strengthened by the arrival of the 92nd and five battalions of the Royal Naval Division under Major General Archibald Paris, and the French Brigade Coloniale from Kum Kale, commanded by Maj General Mansou.

These were shortly followed by other reinforcements, including the 29th Indian Infantry Brigade with its three Gurkha battalions (1/5th, 1/6th and 2/7th) and one Sikh battalion (14th Sikhs) under Brigadier General Cox. The Indian Army was barely 5,000 men in a campaign that involved a deployment that grew from an initial 25,000 to nearly half a million Allied troops engaged by the end of the campaign. Yet it had a significant impact on the course of operations.

The 42nd Division was also represented by the 7th Indian Mountain Artillery Brigade, the Indian Medical Corps and a Medical Establishment. The first Gurkha ashore were of the 2/7th commanded by the Honourable Charles Bruce, and were placed in the immediate rear of the beach within a few hours. They suffered their first casualties: one Gurkha rifleman killed and 22 wounded when they moved into the frontline on 9 May, relieving the British 87th Brigade on the extreme left of the line. It came immediately under fire.

With the arrival of the one brigade of the 42nd Division, the Indian Brigade, and two further ANZAC brigades the allied forces at Gallipoli now numbered around 75,000 men – a combination of English, Scots and Irish, Australians and New Zealanders, French, Algerians and Senegalese, Americans, Canadians, Australians and New Zealanders, French, Algerians and Senegalese, Americans, Canadians, and the Indian Mule Corps. Many of these troops were already exhausted.

However, General Ian Hamilton and his force were now significantly better prepared than they had been at the outset for the next phase of the assault on the Ottoman positions. These, under the overall command of the German General Liman von Sanders, with several other Turkish generals, including Mustapha Kemal (later to become Kemal Ataturk) supporting him, had also been reinforced in the interim and posed a formidable threat to the invading Allies. An attempt was now made by the Allies, however, to move off the beach and into the hills.

The Second Battle of Krithia 11-17th May 1915

On 12 May 1915, the first battle of the 6th Queen Elizabeth’s own Gurkha Rifles, having landed at Cape Helles only a week or so before, set off for the attack. This was their first major operation on Krithia, a bluff overlooking the beach which had been converted into a stronghold by the Ottoman forces whose machine gunners were doing untold damage to the invasion attempts. Two previous attempts to capture it by the 1st Dublin Fusiliers and the Royal Marines had already failed.

The rocks were sheer and 300m high, but, with assistance from the Royal Navy which bombarded the defenders, the Gurkhas managed to scale the cliffs, and after a hard fight in which 12 Ottoman soldiers were decapitated as well as a number shot and 18 Gurkhas were killed and 42 wounded, the 1/6th managed to advance 200m and capture a prominent feature, which was later renamed ‘Gurkha Bluff’ in an order signed by General Hamilton himself. They then dug in.


"During the night of the 10th/11th May, the 6th Gurkhas started off to seize this bluff. Their scouts descended to the sea, worked their way for some distance through the broken ground along the shore and crawled hands and knees up the precipitous face of the cliff. On reaching the top they were heavily fired on. As a surprise the enterprise had failed, but as a reconnaissance it proved very useful. On the following day Major-General H. V. Cox, commanding 29th Indian Infantry Brigade, Lieutenant-Colonel Hon. C. G. Bruce, commanding 1/6th Gurkhas, and Major (temporary Lieutenant-Colonel) F. A. Wyten R.C.A., commanding the Artillery Group supporting the attack. The co-operation of the two cruisers was excellent, and affords another instance of the admirable support by the Navy to our troops."

On 17 May 1915, the following General Order 160 was published:

"In order to mark the good work done by the 1/6th Gurkha Rifles in capturing the Bluff on the coast west of Krithia, the General Officer commanding has ordered that this Bluff will in future be known as ‘Gurkha Bluff’.

The Krithia battles were most significant as they proved that the original British assumption of a swift victory over an indisciplined enemy was grossly mistaken. Therewith, Helles would become the scene of numerous attrition battles and success would be measured by an advance of a hundred yards or the capture of a trench."

"This was just the one battle. Allied casualties for these few days in May alone totalled about 8,500, nearly one-third of the number engaged. Nothwithstanding the advance achieved been more than 800m. Krithia had never looked like falling. Even more serious than this was the loss of life in the first ten days of the campaign: between the landing on 1 May and 10 May, the 29th Division (now including the Indian Brigade) suffered in total some 11,000 casualties, mainly French losses (including its African contingents) ran to about 12,000."

The Allies were now little further forward than when they had landed. Planned for the beaches for the most part, they were exposed to shelling from the Ottoman positions above them, and suffered more casualties. The Ottoman positions, on the other hand, were being constantly shelled from the sea but were also forced to remain vigilant in case of another assault by the Allied forces. A period of relative calm ensued as far as the infantry were concerned.

Back in Britain, the War Council met on 14 May 1915. It considered three possibilities: first, to abandon Gallipoli, second to send mass further reinforcements, third, to replace the losses incurred in the first few weeks, and send out one fresh division. It reached no decision apart from requesting Hamilton to clarify his own view. The next day, the First Sea Lord, Lord Fisher, resigned his post precipitating a political crisis. Asquith’s Liberal government was brittle and Fisher’s resignation broke it apart.

The Prime Minister decided to form a coalition government. Arthur Balfour took over the Admiralty from Churchill, who was effectively demoted to the position of Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. He kept his position on the War Council, which would now be called the Dardanelles Committee, but had been brought down. Sir Henry Jackson, who was lukewarm about the Gallipoli campaign, replaced Lord Fisher. The new government took three weeks to sort itself out.
Caring is the essence of nursing

Hi all,

As we slowly start to get back to our normal routines: some physically unharmed, some slowly recovering from broken limbs while some moving past the loss of loved ones, the uncertainty of future will now cease to confuse and worry us.

How much loss will businesses face and for how long? How many people will relocate? It might be even harder for those in the helping profession.

How many nurses will go back to work without thinking of the never-ending flow of patients whom they were to treat while fearing for their own lives in the midst of the uncertain yet frequent aftershocks? There are findings that work related trauma exposure does affect the physical and mental health of staff in the medical field. While they take care of others, they forget to take care of themselves.

Whatever profession you are in, in a time like this, make time for self care. You may not feel the need now but it will be worth it in the long run.

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

Hello Anjana,

I am a nurse working in a hospital in Kathmandu. When the earthquake struck, I was at the hospital. And before I could fully understand what had happened we had patients coming in with various injuries. As is my duty I attended to them. But as the influx of patients has decreased and my time is not occupied with one emergency after another I find myself scared, stressed and worried. The full force of what has happened is finally hitting me and I am afraid it will affect my work. Is there any way I can bounce back from this mindset?

SSS

AR: Thousands of people are grateful to nurses like you who have helped save lives after this chaotic destruction. In the process, I doubt many of you have taken the time for yourselves feeling the urge to keep helping. One truth is if you do not take care of yourself, you cannot take care of others. It has been a month and as things start toning down, many will start to notice how this incident had changed their lives, and how they think and feel. It is possible to get back to your old self; it just needs a little practice, will and self love.

Multiple exposure to trauma can lead to depression and other health problems. Trauma can give you ongoing stress that can cause difficulty sleeping, concentrating and expressing feelings. First thing to remember is that experiencing trauma feelings is normal, we did have a crisis. It would be strange if you did not feel any different after this life-altering incident.

You may not realise this now but you are a strong person who faced the danger at work and continued to help, you could have left but you stayed with the patients.

Relaxation exercises, having someone to talk to and group therapy, if needed, will help you gain some sense of control. Eat healthy, stay active and try to get enough sleep. Do something you enjoy every day. Hope that it will be okay and think of all the things you are still grateful for.

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

*Jana Aathithi weekly, 20 May*

Amidst the ongoing relief and rehabilitation work, political parties are busy in closed-door meetings to form a new national government. The UML is now holding talks with the NC, the UCPN (Maoist) and the Madhesi parties in a bid to form a new government led by Chairman KP Oli.

The UML’s plan is straightforward: help the NC-led government to write a new constitution by mid-July through a fast-track process and then form a new government under Oli’s leadership with representations from the UCPN (Maoist) and the Madhesi parties.

The UML has also prepared a Plan B: unseat Koirala by withdrawing support to his government and form a new coalition with the UCPN (Maoist) and the Madhesi parties.

The UML is confident that it can form a new government by combining its strength with those of the UCPN (Maoist) and the Madhesi parties. 

UCPN (M) leader Top Bahadur Sourav raj says a new national government will be formed in less than two months.

“The process of forming the national government must be concluded,” he says. “For this, we are ready to pass the constitution by forming a commission to work upon the names and boundaries of federal provinces.”

Sources say Koirala is positive about stepping down, provided he gets the credit for writing the new constitution. But Sher Bahadur Drubu, the most prominent NC leader after Koirala, has his own plan to sabotage the UML’s efforts.

It is believed that he is negotiating with another influential NC leader Ram Chandra Poudel to prevent Oli from becoming the next prime minister. Drubu is ready to help Poudel become the NC’s parliamentary party leader but wants his support to be the party president.

The Maoists are neither too excited nor indifferent to form a new government because they know three parties will not get a chance to lead. Even if a national government is formed under Oli’s leadership, they will get nothing more than a few ministerial berths.

Sources say the UCPN (Maoist) Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal has another plan up his sleeve: help Koirala stay put in office without a new constitution for three more years and make him more unpopular.

Basanta Basnet at Kantipur, 15 May

“It is true that the government has not rightfully recognised efforts made by NGOs, but the biggest target is that the NGOs do not seem interested to work with the government.”

That is a quote from an article by eminent sociologist Chaitanya Mishra over a decade ago during the multi-party democracy era. Similar sentiments have been expressed about our over-dependence on foreign aid, and it being channeled through non-state actors.

Now that Nepal is experimenting with multiparty democracy, the nature of foreign assistance has still not changed at all.

The government has often criticised how foreign assistance is channeled and spent in Nepal. And in the aftermath of the 25 April earthquake, the government is dissatisfied with the way foreign assistance is being used.

Interestingly, Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat, who is perceived as a donor-friendly politician, also appears to be unhappy with the donors this time. “They just brought goods, not cash,” says Mahat. “We need financial assistance for reconstruction and rehabilitation, which we did not get.”

In a meeting between the government and donors last week, he said: “Foreign assistance meant for reconstruction and rehabilitation should not be used for overheads and administrative costs, it should go to earthquake-affected people.”

Mahat is miffed at donors for “talking aloud about their support” but not depositing cash in the Prime Minister Disaster Relief Fund. “Apart from Asian Development Bank’s $300 million, we’ve not received any cash,” he said.

While the government complains about donors not coordinating with government agencies, donors say they are hassled and forced to jump through hoops. As a result of distrust between the government and donors, much of the foreign assistance pledged by various countries has not reached the Prime Minister Disaster Relief Fund.

Denmark and Australia had pledged Rs 600 and Rs 800 million respectively but that money has not yet been deposited in the PM Fund. Both reportedly want to spend the pledged money on their own terms, and their reasoning is that there is no accountability at the local level.

“If the government says two-thirds of foreign assistance will be wasted in the administrative cost of donor agencies if they are not allowed to spend it,” Former Prime Minister Baburnam Bhattarai seconds Mahat’s argument that foreign assistance must be spent by the government, but believes that donors must be assured that their money will not be misused. “Foreigners are running parallel activities because our state is weak,” he says. “Not even 15-20 per cent of the foreign assistance has reached the earthquake-affected people.”

Pitambar Sharma, former vice-chair of the National Planning Commission (NPC), says donors would not have done what they are now doing if the government was strong.

“Look at China, INGOs cannot work there without coordinating with the government, without accepting all preconditions put forth by the Chinese government.” He says Nepal must emulate China but for that the state needs to be much stronger than it is now.

Economist Keshav Acharya says the government might be weak but that should not be an excuse for donors to do whatever they want. “See what’s happening in Haiti, donors have spent more than $13 billion, with not much to show for it.”
Déjà vu for Tibet’s refugees
Living inside tented camps has brought back memories of the past for Tibetans

Tsering Dolker Gurung

A Tibetan refugee’s account of the 25 April earthquake

Sixty-eight-year-old Sonam Palmo, Bhutanese and the Tibetan refugees being categorised as non-residents.

In 1986 the family came to Kathmandu, and settled in Ekantakuna after her parents got a job at the Jawalakhel Handicraft Centre. It was also the year the family lived inside a house for the first time. Palmo herself has been working at a kindergarten run by the centre.

If there’s another earthquake my body, I can’t even see where I am when I was forced out of Bhutan. All four of his children were born here, and Giri is upset no one from the Nepali government or relief agencies have visited.

“The centre has served as a model community co-op for 50 years with jobs, free day care for infants, subsidised health care and education, pension and paid leave. Similar centres were also set up for Tibetan refugees in Pokhara, Dhoptaran and Solu Khumbu. They became the nucleus around Nepal’s carpet export industry which at one time made up one-third of the country’s total export earnings.

Purna Giri realised his dream of opening an OPD clinic for refugees a week after the quake. The clinic is run by the centre.

The centre, which houses the weaving section of the Jawalakhel Handicraft Centre, has remained closed since 25 April (see box).

Many families in the area have their own business.

Dawa, head of the settlement.

The ground floor of the main building, which houses the weaving section, has suffered the most. Diagonal cracks have appeared on walls, and pillars are dislocated. Engineers who inspected the facility advised the buildings be brought down and rebuilt.

Despite the challenges, Dolma believes she is strong. "We are strong people, we came here with nothing and have built all this. We can do it again," she says.

“I imagine how much more delayed rescue and relief would have been," says Karma Dawa, the settlement head and chair of the handicap centre who has written to various international organisations food.

Phuntsok Namgyal, a member of a local youth club who has been co-ordinating the relief effort, says the residents worry once they have returned to the tents following the earthquake. But some, like the block Tseten Dhundup, 35, lives in with seven other families was just plastered over from outside.

An engineer from NSET inspected the building and estimated the cost of retrofitting at Rs 3 million,” says Dhundup, but that’s too much money for the families that earn their living weaving carpets at the Jawalakhel Handicraft Centre that has remained closed since 25 April (see box).

Sixty-eight-year-old Sonam Palmo, is, however not worried. “We are strong people, we came here with nothing and have built all this. We can do it again,” she says.

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CTA, the Tibetan Community Affairs office, helps the centre and residents with funds and construction.

“My body was able,”

The rise and fall of the carpet industry, #557

A Tibetan refugee’s account of the 25 April earthquake

Ngment Dolma was in her forties when she escaped her village in eastern Tibet along with her three children and an elderly mother in 1959. It took Dolma and her family three years to cross over into Mustang. Constantly under threat of being captured by Chinese soldiers, they only travelled at night across high mountain passes.

Until last month’s earthquake, 100-year-old Dolma considered that journey to be the hardest thing she had ever faced in life. But after three weeks of living inside a tent with four other families after the earthquake, the Tibetan refugee thinks differently.

“Tsering Dolker Gurung

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Camping out in a refugee camp

The ground floor of the main building, which houses the weaving section, has suffered the most. Diagonal cracks have appeared on walls, and pillars are dislocated. Engineers who inspected the facility advised the buildings be brought down and rebuilt.

Phuntsok Namgyal, a member of a local youth club who has been co-ordinating the relief effort, says the residents worry once they have returned to the tents following the earthquake. But some, like the block Tseten Dhundup, 35, lives in with seven other families was just plastered over from outside.

An engineer from NSET inspected the building and estimated the cost of retrofitting at Rs 3 million,” says Dhundup, but that’s too much money for the families that earn their living weaving carpets at the Jawalakhel Handicraft Centre that has remained closed since 25 April (see box).

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The earthquake on 25 April and continuing aftershocks have left many in the refugee camps in Balungai traumatised. Fifty-year-old Netra Lal Giri was only 25 and newly married when he was forced out of Bhutan. All four of his children were born here, and Giri is upset no one from the Nepali government or relief agencies have visited.

“Luckily, there was no deaths or damage here, the Nepali government doesn’t care for refugees so you can imagine how much more delayed rescue and relief would have been,” says Giri.

In 1985 Bhutan rectified its Citizenship Act and categorised children whose father or mother were not Bhutanese as non-residents.

Gopal Garttoo
“Partnership, trust, and coordination”

What impact do you see on tourism and agriculture?

We think tourism could be the hardest-hit sector. It directly or indirectly generates almost 10 per cent of the GDP and jobs, and popular spots like the World Heritage Sites, Everest and Langtang Mountains. Top hotels have been closed for weeks, and tourists have stayed away. But we should remember Nepal’s natural beauty and cultural heritage are undiminished, the tourism potential had also been heavily underestimated. The sector can come back strongly with proper promotion and product packaging to attract more tourists and promote higher spending.

As to agriculture, the severely affected districts account for 14 per cent of the country’s total agriculture land holding. When the earthquake struck, harvesting of winter and summer crops had mostly completed. But minimising the impact on monsoon crops will require timely availability of seeds, fertiliser, draught power, and labour. Livestock in the affected districts will have to be speeded up to areas that still haven’t received them.

How best could emergency relief and shelter be speeded up to areas that still haven’t received them?

As explained, solidarity of all the key players led by the government with the help of international agencies and UN systems would be essential to deal with this scale of devastation. Usually, defense and police forces can play a quite significant role in rescue, relief, and early recovery, given their strong human skills, discipline, and logistical bases that are also demonstrated here. Building on such strengths, all key players may join hands with strong coordination and collaboration, by ideally setting up a common platform to jointly plan and execute who are delivering what goods in which villages in what schedule and how, at VDC, district, and national levels. Existing setup such as ward citizens forum may play an active role in networking and coordination.

You have just returned from northern Gorkha, what was your impression?

Yes, I was there with the World Food Programme team. Relief operations seemed under good control reaching remotest villages where there was good community spirit and coordination among different parties. Local people said they immediately needed temporary shelter that can endure the monsoon. Delivery of material and tools in a limited time span appears a critical challenge along with labour and logistics. The relief teams are also doing immediate needs assessment by checking available local material and skilled labour to identify gaps to be filled from external sources. Such an approach will provide a good basis to seamlessly start recovery and reconstruction activities most efficiently. This means there should be good coordination between relief and recovery teams.

What is your assessment of the Nepal government’s response to the earthquake?

One may be tempted to say that the response could have been faster. But we should recognize the huge scale of the disaster in remote and inaccessible terrain. Before the earthquake, our discussion on preparedness was largely focused on possible devastation in Kathmandu, the capital. Before the earthquake, our discussion on preparedness was also helping with relief in Sindhupalchok. ADB is now taking part in the joint post-disaster needs assessment by the government and donors that will prepare a reconstruction strategy and plan. An emergency $200 million assistance project is envisaged for priorities such as rebuilding schools, rural infrastructure. Before the earthquake, ADB and the Australian government supported retrofitting of 160 schools in Kathmandu and preparation of a national school safety master plan.

What is the ADB’s view on plans to set up a separate disaster management commission?

We may differentiate reconstruction from permanent disaster management. Reconstruction has to be implemented quickly and efficiently. Reconstruction should also go hand in hand with development programs without affecting each other. In this sense, establishing a special purpose agency for the duration of the reconstruction period with a lean setup and streamlined budget, execution, and decision making systems can make sense. But it needs to be established without diverting human resources of existing ministries or causing conflict or rivalry. Such a lean setup also assumes substantial outsourcing in implementing programs, other than government staff doing everything. In our view, these need to be met if such an option is considered.

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Tanka Jirel was in Charikot counting a stack of plastic sheets for survivors of the 25 April earthquake when the aftershock hit. Here in Dolakha, the aftershock was more destructive than the main earthquake.

Clouds of dust rose from the surrounding mountains, as landslides tumbled down the slopes. Jirel (right) ran past collapsed buildings and rubble on the streets to jump on a vehicle to Jiri, passing numerous rockfalls along the 50km road.

Medical Superintendent Roshan Khatri was in the outpatient clinic in Jiri when the jolt hit. He panicked, but told himself to calm down, and made a plan of action with staff to treat the wounded who would surely come.

Patients from the first quake were moved out to the badminton court, and a tent station set up to assess newly-injured patients. A third team put on hard hats and began pulling out medical supplies from the rubble of the collapsed hospital to set up a pharmacy under a tree.

When Tanka Jirel got back to Jiri that evening, his scenic town was harshly altered. The long street of tidy trekking lodges and village shops lay in ruins. All the old hotels were shaken to rubble, the interior of their rooms visible from the streets.

Things weren’t better at the hospital: out of the five patient-care buildings, four were dangerously cracked, and only one of the five staff quarters was potentially salvageable. Fortunately, the first earthquake had been a warning to people to vacate damaged buildings, which meant that there was only one death in Jiri – a monk in a monastery above town.

Jirel’s first priority for his hospital was tents. “I grabbed two tents from the municipality and the officials didn’t like it since some of them had been sleeping in them, but what to do?” Jirel recalls. Over the next few days Jirel added 15 tents of different types from relief agencies, the Health Ministry and the Nepal Army. There was no electricity, phones didn’t work. Generators were used during operations.

Roshan Khatri and his team of doctors, nurses, and paramedics eventually treated 98 injured patients from the second earthquake, eight of whom were evacuated to Kathmandu by helicopter. Existing maternity services kept going, with six caesarean sections in three weeks. When a team of American doctors arrived to offer help, the hospital management advised them to go to less served areas in northern Dolakha.

“Tanka Jirel is still busy with emergency recovery and hasn’t got to the point of thinking about rebuilding his hospital. ‘Right now, we’re just taking care of what’s in front of us,’ he says rubbing his tired eyes. ‘Most staff are still too afraid to go indoors. When we can do that, we can start thinking about rebuilding. Let’s hope that our friends will remember us then.’”

Khatri surveys the compound, littered with the debris from the crumbling hospital, assorted sizes and colours of tents and, smiling with conviction, says: “We are strong. We are Nepali. We will bounce back.”

Mark Zimmerman