When it rains, it pours

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BY SONIA AWALE PAGE 14-15

IT’S COMING

Quake False Alarm

International Aid False Alarm

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It there were still doubts about just how challenging the rainy season will be to compound the misery unleashed by the earthquakes, the landslide on the Kali Gandaki in Myagdi district last week was a timely reminder. If the entire side of a mountain could fall into a major Himalayan river, blocking it for 16 hours even though it was 120km from the epicentre and there were no big aftershocks at the time, imagine what it will be like when the rains arrive.

Even as we write this on Tuesday night, a M5 aftershock with an epicentre in Rasuwa is rocking central Nepal. The mountains are still trembling, the slopes unstable – all that is needed is water and gravity to complete the vicious cycle. Within a month, the monsoon will arrive unloosening the rains on these crumbling slopes. Central Nepal gets between 1,500-3,000mm of annual precipitation in an average year, and 85 per cent of that usually falls in the four months between June-September.

Villages and settlements in the direct path of existing landslides need to be urgently relocated. For Rasuwag, Sindhupalchok and Dolakha this means just about every building in Myagdi and Sindhupalchok. The government’s relief mechanism needs to go into overdrive. Although many have already left, it will be a gigantic task to move the others to safer places.

Nepal’s disaster isn’t over yet: it is just moving into the next phase. The government’s relief mechanism needs to go back into rescue mode. It needs to be on high alert to detect, assess, evacuate and organise the release of water impounded by landslide lakes. Given the shortage of helicopters and low cloud cover, this is going to be a very difficult task.

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living in temporary shelters like this one in Kathmandu buckling down for a thunderstorm this week (pic, opposite). The risk of water-borne diseases is very high for living in temporary shelters like this one in Kathmandu. Don’t have to die because they cannot rebuild the health system so that Nepalis can reconstruct destroyed hospitals, but to confront the monsoon, but of the future.

Thankfully, public awareness about sanitation and safe water is higher than it used to be, and the government is gearing up with medicines. The Department of Health Services Logistics Division in Teku is a hive of activity these days. X-ray machines are being loaded for dispatch to Chautara and Charikot, a truckful of peanut paste is handed off to Raura, and cold boxes with anti-tetanus vaccines are being rushed to Gorhka. The health authorities are working seamlessly with WHO and UNICEF, which immediately flew in their Nepali staff from countries in the region to work alongside the government in the field. As we report on page 14-15, despite awareness and the preparation, this is going to be a monsoon of misery and ill health. The main task is to keep outbreaks in check, focus on the most vulnerable populations including 1.7 million children, the new borns and an estimated 160,000 pregnant women in the affected areas, tackle malnutrition that makes children more prone to infections.

Nepal has taken dramatic strides in maternal and child health in the past 15 years, many maternal and child health in the past 15 years, many

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The lack of a better alternative is what makes the resilient Nepal nature in all the relief work as well. It’s a rubbish place to be as a people, unable to trust our own government and bureaucracy and to be equally suspicious of other governments and foreign organisations here to help.

For many years now, those who work for the government and bureaucracy have been almost unanimously considered corrupt, greedy, and inefficient by Nepalis, and also by foreign aid organisations and governments. Increasingly, however, the latter bunch – the donors – are also considered opaque and inefficient in a classier and less-obvious way. As Nepalis, we pour our frustrations rightly on this government and bureaucracy, considering any corruption and inefficiency on part of this state is paid by our tax money. And to think that our money supports red tape is infuriating. But none of this is ‘news’ news, and the lack of state-presence long predates the earthquake. Not only have we known that well-meaning foreigners have spent millions of dollars in efforts to create an accountable state for us. But, surely, accountability would be best learnt if the donors implementing the programs led by example. That way, the beneficiaries might actually take the lesson seriously instead of signing up just for the free ride.

The holier-than-thou position of much of Nepal’s aid regime is the real problem. That wouldn’t be the case were our government accountable to us. But, it isn’t. The donor argument is that working through the government invites dealing with corruption and delays. Unfortunately, instead of trying to strengthen the government and make it accountable, many donors are quick to bypass it, deepening the problem. So when the Nepali government says, for example, that not giving directly to the PM Relief Fund is a way to profit from Nepal’s disaster, one can’t help but feel there is an ounce of weight to the argument.

For example, one wonders why the PM’s Relief Fund has collected a mere $39 million even as individuals like Joanna Lumley raised $50 million for Nepal. That money went to the Disasters Emergency Committee, a coalition of 13 UK charities working on relief in Nepal. Granted if that money came into the PM Relief Fund perhaps some of it would be siphoned off, against which we may have been able to rally. But can we guarantee that all the $56 million which Ms Lumley has selflessly worked to raise will even make it to Nepal? The answer is probably not. And we probably won’t be able to say a thing about it, either.

Donor-government tension during this crisis was exemplified by Chinook helicopters that Britain offered, but was declined by the Nepali Army. The official government stance was ‘technical’; they are loud, heavy, came too late, and could blow off roofs. Unsurprisingly, the burden of Nepal’s dysfunctional politics, fuelled by a controversy-obessed media, did not invite justification and instead dragged into an otherwise logistical question, our geopolitical issues of sovereignty and nationalism. Because, surely, nothing in Nepal can be spared of these obsessions — not even an earthquake.

One government official said about the Chinook fiasco, “There is some politics involved.” It is ever more apparent that the ‘politics’ here are merely an attempt to politicise what should have been understood as a logistical mishap on the giving and receiving end. It diverted attention away from the real crisis, and offered room to widen mistrust among and between various state and non-state actors. This case is almost emblematic of the business as usual mindset that Nepal and some concerned outsiders continue to harbour at the expense of relief efforts on the ground. It doesn’t help when the state machinery and political parties are intolerant, and the international community is oozing with arrogance.

The ghosts of Haiti’s post-earthquake aid disaster seem to be haunting our political class more than is necessary, especially considering that this free-for-all aid regime in Nepal is certainly not a new phenomenon. It seems both the state, political parties and their leaders, as well as some members of the international community and NGOs are putting their interests ahead of the crisis at hand. As for the Nepali state, on whose shoulder the greatest burden of rebuilding trust (and whose interests ahead of the crisis at hand. As for the Nepali state, on whose shoulder the greatest burden of rebuilding trust (and whose), now is certainly not the time to be focusing on other countries and organisations overstepping their boundaries.

While Nepal’s dysfunctional politics are a major issue, the fact is that Nepal is not alone in this. Many other countries have struggled to create systems that are accountable to the people. But for this, it is not only the government which will need to be pinched and prodded.
The 25 April earthquake was so shocking that it was the first time people there didn’t seem to be anyone in charge. But as the dust settled, two aspects became clear: responsibility, and intergovernmentalism. In Maghajin of Sindupalchok all 46 houses were destroyed or damaged, and 300 people were busy calling for temporary shelters ready with any help from anyone. Like most survivors, people are getting on with their lives, but they didn’t seem to the government to come to their aid. When the 12 May aftershock came there was nothing left to destroy in Maghajin.

**THE DEADLINE**

Damakant Jayshi

The same story was repeated in Barpak of Gorkha close to the epicentre where 10 per cent of the houses were destroyed. The sense of self-help and community spirit was so strong that reconstruction began almost immediately.

Maghajin, Barpak and many other settlements in Central Nepal are inspirations to the rest of us. A lot needs to be done for the people and places devastated by the earthquake, but the local people are already on it.

Now zoom in on what our politicians are up to. It took them a whole month to even register that there had been an earthquake, and even then it was just to do a photo-op with hard hats. They were too busy calling for the formation of a national government. Government, gonna-be prime ministers, are up to. It took them a whole month to decide what to do. History sure repeats itself as a farce.

Because the call for a new government to speed up reconstruction and rehabilitation was sounded so hollow, politicians thought that if they suggested such a government would also help draft the constitution by consensus. But how can parliamentarians, who have been leaders have been discussion the contents of the new statute for seven years, and they will suddenly come to a consensus because of an earthquake?

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**Quake from space**

**AYESHA SHAKYA**

The 25 April earthquake and the swarm of high-intensity aftershocks in the past month have made the mountains of Central Nepal highly unstable, and the approaching monsoon rains could trigger landslides and block rivers.

After the earthquake, Nepal must now prepare for secondary disasters like rockfalls, slope failures, glacial lake outburst floods and avalanches. Early warning could save lives, but how can we monitor these megadisasters?

An international volunteer team made up of the Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), the National Aerospace and Space Administration (NASA) the University of Arizona, Chinese Academy of Sciences, the US Geological Survey, British Geological Survey and Durham University have been using high-resolution satellite imagery to map and assess these hazards.

**REMOTE SENSING**

High-resolution satellite imagery, like this of Helambu on 8 May, can help the country assess hazards from landslides and save lives.

“The greatest risks right now are landslides,” says Arun Bhakta Shrestha of ICIMOD, which has located 2,000 landslides triggered by the quake, many of which could grow in size and destructive capacity.

Geeksha, Rasuwa, Dhading and Sindupalchok have the highest number of landslides, and based on satellite imagery researchers now have an inventory of potentially deadly cones with their location and size pinpointed, and if they pose any danger to blocking rivers.

One potentially dangerous landslide after the 25 April earthquake came down on the Marsyangdi River in Lower Pisang Village of Manang district. After analysing this river blockage, Shrestha researchers created a model for which way the river would flow if the dam was to be broken. At the moment, the threat of a landslide is still there if the dam is breached and a more accurate estimate of the volume of water is needed.

In other areas, concerned locals have directly reached out to scientists for help. For example, there was some panic that the Tso Rolpa glacial lake might burst following the 12 May aftershock because of its proximity to the epicentre.

“Comparing before-after images of the area and monitoring the shake intensity, we came to the conclusion that there was no additional risk,” says Shrestha, and the government passed this information back to the Dolakha district administration.

But another team of researchers from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) made an on-site inspection of the moraine-dam at Tso Rolpa and installed a community-based early warning system in coordination with the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology.

The system is installed close to the lake. If the water rises to a dangerous level a warning will be received and disseminated through SMS to downstream communities,” says Vijaya Singh, assistant country director of UNDP.

Rapid satellite imagery has also been used to assess the damage caused by avalanches, specifically in Langtang where an entire village of 500 people was buried by an avalanche that also destroyed ICIMOD’s Langtang observatory station.

“While GIS and remote sensing is a good starting point in the assessment of future hazards, it has its downsides. High-resolution imagery cannot be accessed on a regular basis and cloud cover can block view of the imagery needed,” researchers are now preparing for more detailed mapping of pictures so that they can try to predict which areas pose a danger to human habitation. They will be using both satellite imagery and site visits to cross validate using drones and early warning systems, similar to the one installed in Tso Rolpa, will then be placed.

Times nepaltimes.com before image

The system is installed close to the lake.
The first earthquake on 25 April damaged three hydropower plants, under construction, on the Trisuli River in Rasuwa district. Then, as if it was pre-planned, the 12 May aftershock had its epicenter in Dolakha district where the mammoth 436MW Upper Tama Kosi is being built.

Existing hydropower plants like the Bhote Kosi (45 MW) were also severely damaged, knocking out 100MW from the grid. Last week, the fear of a flash flood on the Kali Gandaki due to landslide blockage upstream closed down Nepal’s biggest hydropower plant for two days.

Luckily, power rationing has been kept in check because of the increased flow on rivers as the temporary reduction in demand from Kathmandu Valley has offset the losses. “This is a huge setback to Nepal, we will need a lot of time and money to recover fully,” says Ram Gopal Siwalok of Chilime Hydropower Company, which the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) is building in Rasuwa.

Construction, even, in hydropower plants that were not damaged have been halted because the access roads have been blocked by landslides, and workers have gone home to help their families rebuild.

A preliminary report by Independent Power Producers Association Nepal (IPPAN) shows the earthquake has thrown at least 42 mega and small hydropower plants out of operation. Three more hydropower plants developed by government entities have also been shut down.

If the damaged hydropower plants cannot be repaired quickly, NEA will be forced to ration power for the rest of the year, especially in the winter. Its goal of ending load-shedding by 2017 is not likely to be met.

The Bhote Kosi (45 MW) and Trisuli (24 MW) are two of the bigger existing projects hit by the quake. Although damage suffered by Trisuli is not as serious and can be repaired in less than a month, the penstock pipe of the Bhote Kosi has been badly damaged, its powerhouse submerged and access road also blocked by landslides. Repairs could take up to a year.

The much-delayed Upper Tama Kosi (456 MW) was scheduled for completion next year, but its main wire has subsided by 17 cm, and the access road to Charikot has been blocked by gigantic rockfall that will take months to clear.

“We are looking at a minimum of six-month delay,” says Ganesh Neupane of the Upper Tama Kosi project. “And every month of delay means costs go up.”

Upper Trisuli 3A (80 MW) was also expected to start generating power next year. But the Chinese contractors have left and work has been halted indefinitely.

The delay in the completion of mega projects like Upper Tamakoshi and Upper Trisuli is a huge blow to Nepal’s plan to reduce power outage to less than two hours from winter 2017.

Says Neupane, “No matter how much effort we make, meeting our target is now not possible and we will have to grapple with power outage for more years.”

Constructions of several other mega projects like the 216 MW Upper Trisuli 1 project were all set to begin right when the earthquakes struck. The fate of all these projects now hangs in balance.

IPPAN President Khadga Bahadur Bista says operating plants can be repaired but the under-construction and ready-to-go projects now face a huge uncertainty. “None of these will be able to meet their commercial operation dates,” he says. “The earthquake turned out to be the most devastating blow to Nepal’s energy sector after the Maoist war.”

Bista says the earthquake has exhausted investors and entrepreneurs physically and mentally, but adds: “I hope this will make us stronger. Our confidence is not shaken.”

Back to the dark age
Nepal’s plan to end electricity rationing by 2017 will not be met because of earthquake damage

OM ASTHA RAI

Aftermath: The prestock pipe of the Bhote Kosi hydropower plant (gwh) has been badly damaged, its powerhouse submerged and access roads blocked by landslides.
Where are we?

Ncell partners with Flowminder to track movement of Nepalis post-earthquake

AYESHA SHAKYA

More than 600,000 people left Kathmandu following the earthquake in its first week, while thousands of quake displaced people have temporarily settled in the capital. How do we know this? By tracking cellphone data.

To understand the movement pattern of people for effective aid distribution, Ncell collaborated with Swedish organisation Flowminder to make use of the cellular network data for earthquake response.

"Understanding people’s movement after a disaster is key for government and relief agencies in order to provide relief supplies, shelter, food, and medicine to the right place," Erik Wetter of Flowminder told Nepal Times.

Ncell had been in talks with Flowminder, which used anonymous cellular network data for crisis response in 2010 in Haiti when the country was hit by an earthquake and a cholera outbreak, for setting up a similar process in Nepal since last year.

"With Nepal being a high risk zone for earthquakes, Telcomsena group was keen on developing the technology for crisis response," said Milan Sharma of Ncell. It was a coincidence that the earthquake hit just as the Ncell-Flowminder partnership materialized. Cellular data was collected from 12 million telephones comprising of Ncell’s active users. Records of names and numbers are anonymised to protect the privacy of individuals and these records are kept encrypted within the operator’s premises and access to the data is controlled.

The analysis was done based on the movement of de-identified Ncell SIM cards which made or received at least one call during the week prior to the earthquake and also made or received at least one call after the earthquake.

"We analyse the signals received by the telecommunication towers to understand the changes in mobility patterns. We compare the SIM card movements to pre-earthquake movements to calculate the number of people who have moved in and out of a certain periphery," said Sharma.

Based on the population estimates of 1 May, 2015, nearly 390,000 people had left Kathmandu and 347,000 people had come into the area within the same time period. The red circles on the map (below) suggest that most people moved to areas in the south, central and western regions.

The number of people coming into Kathmandu was also drastically reduced as shown by the movement of people from Gorkha district (above). The large blue circles near Chitwan and Kathmandu suggest less people than normal were in these districts following the earthquake.

The information gives us a better idea about where people move after a disaster and when they come back, which will be especially important in the coming monsoon when there is a high chance of entire settlements being displaced.

According to Wetter, the analysis of cellular data network provides more precise data on how people move compared to other methods.

“Manual counts, surveys and satellite imagery have severe shortcomings meaning that government and relief agencies have a hard time providing the right support to the right place at the right time," he adds.

The data compiled has been sent out to all agencies in Nepal such as UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, International Office for Migration and UN World Food Programme to help in their aid distribution. However, it is still too early to say how it has been used.

Flowminder and Ncell will continue this as a long term project and will provide analyses throughout the year, as weekly or bi-weekly updates. The second update of data will be released by the last week of May.

An increasing number of people from earthquake affected districts are seeking shelter on the outskirts of Kathmandu Valley

OM ASTHA RAI

Pasing Sherpa, 42, (pic) did not want to leave his village – a tiny settlement in Tatopani VDC of Sindhupalchok district near the Chinese border.

Even after a powerful earthquake flattened his house on 25 April, Sherpa wanted to continue living there. He was determined to build a temporary shelter from materials he had salvaged from the ruins of his old house.

The 7.8 magnitude tremor tore down the hills surrounding Sherpa’s village, triggering massive landslides that buried many houses. Despite the devastation caused by the earthquake and the ensuing landslides, Sherpa spent the first night in a tent next to the ruins of his home. The next day, a powerful aftershock struck central Nepal and destroyed what was left of Tatopani.

Sherpa and his neighbours then moved to Bhumchaur, and spent two nights under a large makeshift tent.

When Sherpa returned to rebuild his house, his village was once again hit by landslides. He gave up, and came to Kathmandu.

“I was born there and wanted to die there, be buried next to my ancestors. But it looks like I was destined to die elsewhere more like a refugee,” says Sherpa.

Sherpa first stayed at a relative’s house but moved to a relief camp in Boudha a week ago. His wife and three children are also staying at the camp. A month after the earthquake normalcy might be returning for those whose houses remain intact but for the hundreds of thousands displaced, life has changed forever.

Dawa Sherpa, a 32-year-old from Tatopani, is helping displaced people from his village to find shelters in Kathmandu. He says around 450 families have been displaced by the earthquake-induced landslides in Tatopani.

“The earthquake destroyed our houses and the landslides uprooted us,” he says. “The villages where we grew up will be buried under landslide debris in the coming monsoon.”

While some families displaced from Tatopani have found shelters in Boudha, others are in relief camps in Thal and Mulpani. Thousands of people displaced from other villages of Sindhupalchok, the worst-hit district where more than 3,429 people died and 63,885 houses were destroyed, have also moved to Kathmandu Valley.

Mohan Bahadur Banstet, a CA member from Sindhupalchok, says more than 5,000 people displaced from 25 VDCs of the district are now living in different camps on the outskirts of the valley including in Sankhu, Bohe, Sallaghari and Balkot.

After the earthquake, 1.2 million people left Kathmandu Valley amidst rumours that the valley would be hit by a bigger earthquake and epidemics. Some, also, returned to their villages to help rebuild homes. But at the same time, thousands of people from quake-affected districts came to the valley.

While people who left the valley are now gradually coming back, for those displaced there is nowhere else to go. And thousands of more people are still living in the villages susceptible to landslides.

A parliamentary committee has instructed the government to relocate people living in landslide-prone areas.

Department of Mines and Geology, with technical support from International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) and TU’s Geology Department, has mobilised 17 teams to map the landslide-prone areas and recommended relocations of settlements.

Relocation might take off, albeit slowly. But displaced people like Sherpa are worried about their future ‘homes.’

“I was born on a mountain, I feel comfortable in cold weather,” he says. “I cannot go to the Tarai even if the government sends me there. I am looking for a place that has the same geography and weather as Tatopani.”
By now even those who can’t speak Spanish have heard that this is an El Nino year. Indian monsoon simulations have shown that the rains this year will be 60 per cent of normal in large parts of the country, including central Nepal. This may be good news if it reduces the danger of landslides on slopes made unstable by the recent quakes. However, it means agriculture and electricity generation will be badly hit. A pre-monsoonal trough is headed our way for the weekend, so expect cloud buildup and some celestial fireworks. Temperature will pass 31 degrees when the sun is out, still better than New Delhi.

KATHMANDU

Where have all the tourists gone?

A ny other year this would be peak tourist season in Pokhara, and the lakeside town would be teeming with trekkers, or those just back from paragliding, ultra-light flights, rafting or ziplining. There would have been Indian pilgrims on their way to Muktinath, or Chinese honeymooners boating on Phewa lake.

Today, Pokhara is eerily empty. Every shop, restaurant, and hotel is deserted. A fancy coffee shop that opened last year that also sells locally made t-shirts hasn’t had a customer in a week. A popular bar frequented largely by international tourists now only sees local visitors. Taxi-drivers and boatmen while their time gambling on the sidewalk.

“It was as if the earthquake swept away all the tourists,” said one restaurant owner among many who have sent their staff on unpaid leave. Pokhara serves as the gateway to treks in the Annapurnas, and it is also a favourite weekend getaway for Kathmandu residents.

International media coverage of the quake made it sound like the whole of Nepal was destroyed, and images of collapsed buildings and old heritage sites in Kathmandu made it to the front pages. Media failed to report that 80 per cent of Kathmandu’s houses were still intact, the airport was open, and that only 14 of Nepal’s 75 districts were affected.

German tourist Mark Kessler (pic, far right) who was on the Annapurna Circuit trek when the earthquake struck says he was surprised to be asked by family and friends in Germany if there were any buildings left in Nepal.

“All they had seen on the news were pictures of damaged houses and ruins,” said Kessler, who decided to stay back and is headed to Lumbini next. “I told them the part of Nepal I was in hasn’t been affected much. My stay has been great and the people have been extremely nice. I would love to come back with my mother next year.”

Kessler plans to write about his Nepal experience to encourage people to visit the country. “It would be a pity if the money that they would have spent in this country went elsewhere,” he said. But Kessler is an exception, he was one of a handful of tourists we met in Pokhara this week.

Arrivals in Pokhara have dropped by almost 95 per cent and most hotels have only 2 per cent occupancy rate. “We had 100 per cent pre-booking for May and June, all of which got cancelled within a week of the quake,” said Krishna Prasad Pandey of Hotel Landmark.

Temple Tree, a boutique hotel located at Lakeside would normally have been fully booked this time of year. Only 30 per cent of its rooms were occupied this week, mainly by Nepali guests.

For Hom Budathoki at Mike’s Breakfast, all this brings back memories of the conflict years. “But even during the war, Pokhara was never this empty,” he said. “The government and the NTB should be out there promoting Nepal, and telling the world that we are back in business.”

This week the Western Hotel Association of Nepal announced huge discounts on hotels, restaurants, and trekking packages in Pokhara. Room tariff is down by 50 per cent, 20 per cent discount on restaurants, 30 per cent on trekking packages, 20 per cent on bus fare, 20 per cent on trekking gears and adventure sports. The offer is valid until 30 September.

Said Pandey: “Our message is, Pokhara is beautiful, it wasn’t affected by the earthquake and now is the time to visit.”
The first thought that comes to mind as one approaches the village of Barpak a month after the earthquake is that things don’t look as bad as portrayed in the media. The houses seem intact, collapsed roofs have been replaced with tarpaulin sheets, and there is no rubble. But that is only from a distance.

Nearly all of Barpak’s 1,400 homes were destroyed in the quake: six of the seven schools collapsed. The VDC office, a health post, and the tourism centre were all leveled. A 130 kilowatt micro-hydro plant and a telecommunication tower were also damaged.

Nothing much remains of this picturesque and prosperous hilltop town situated at 1,900m and commanding a sweeping view of mountains on the northern horizon. Gorkha’s ‘model village’ is now just an example of what being on top of the epicentre of a 7.8 quake can do to a settlement.

The architect of Barpak’s past, and of its future, is Bir Bahadur Ghale, the visionary who has channeled the energy and international exposure of a town, made up mostly of families of Gurkha soldiers in the British and Indian Armies into development over the past 30 years.

“We have all learnt important lessons from this disaster,” he said, surveying the ruins of what used to be his hometown. “The goal is to make an even better Barpak and not repeat the blunders of our ancestors.”

Ghale is now working with the Help Barpak team, a group of ex-Gurkha servicemen and entrepreneurs to steer reconstruction with earthquake resistant houses and schools that also reflect the village’s heritage.

The quake also underlined the importance of open spaces, since ten people were killed in fires, during the earthquake, in the densely-packed town with narrow cobblestone alleys.

“Keeping future disasters in mind, we want to have wider roads so rescue vehicles can reach any part of the town,” says Ghale, who also wants to revive tourism that used to be one of Barpak’s main sources of income after remittances.

Nearly half of the village population works overseas, as soldiers in the British or Indian Army, or in Malaysia and the Gulf countries. Many have returned following the quake.

Mukunda Ghale (‘Robin’) is a restaurant manager from Hong Kong who collected funds from friends and came to Barpak with relief material and rescue gear last week. The father of two led
a volunteer initiative to clear
rains, clean the rivers and build
temporary toilets.
"You couldn’t walk on these
streets until five days ago," says
Mukunda who gathered 160
volunteers on the first day and
today has 600 people turning up
to help. "The spirit of the people
has been amazing."
Barpak’s VDC secretary, Chep
Prasad Amgain, believes
having a large number of people
return home from abroad has
helped boost the morale of the
local people, who used to be
mostly made of women and the
elderly. On Saturday 200 villagers
gathered to clear debris of the
village high school while the
Nepal Army worked on building
temporary classrooms next to
it. The government has asked
schools to restart classes from
next week.
Barpak’s resident population
is predominantly female. But Bir
Bahadur Ghale doesn’t see that
as a problem. "There’s no reason
why a woman can’t carry bricks
or lift wooden beams. The belief
that only men should do physical
labour is outdated."
Another priority will be to
restart the Barpak Homestay
program for trekkers led by a
feisty Manus Ghale, which had
just started to take off when the
earthquake hit the village. Last
year Barpak received 1,200 home
guests.
As the epicenter of the quake,
Barpak has received immense
attention from media, relief
agencies and donors. There’s
no electricity but locals enjoy
free wi-fi service provided by
Worldlink. Two mobile charging
stations have also been set
up. Just this week, Barpak’s
supporters in the United Sates
helped acquire a temporary diesel
generator that will provide three
hours of electricity every evening.
"It’s important for the villagers
to feel normal, to get connected
to the outside world and see
that they are not the only ones
affected by the quake," says Bir
Bahadur.
Barpak’s reputation for self-
reliance has made many question
whether the town really needs all
the help we can get."
"There’s no reason why a woman can’t carry bricks or lift wooden beams. The belief that only men should do physical labour is outdated."

Not all are Gurkhas

"Bir Bahadur Ghale was
studying in Grade Nine, he was
recruited by a businessman to go
to Hong Kong and bring back electronic
goods – a lucrative trade in those days.
As Ghale stood atop Victoria Hill,
taking in the view of what was still a
British colony, and looked down at the
illuminated harbor and city, he was
stunned by the level of use of electricity.
"Everything ran on electricity and
I asked myself why our village
couldn’t have power too," says Ghale.
After returning, Ghale graduated
from high school and worked for a
contractor, building a section of the
Makeshu-Naukai highway. One evening,
he noticed the lights kept flickering at a
roadside eatery and asked the owner
why that was happening. He was told it
was because the electricity was supplied
from a mill and the power went out
when the mill was in operation.
In 1987 Ghale returned to his village
and wanted to install a micro-hydro
plant, but villagers were skeptical.
They didn’t believe a teenager
could light up the village, which still
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houses to get electricity were in the Dalit
neighbourhood. Soon, everybody in
Barpak wanted lights.
But Ghale didn’t want electricity to
be used only for lighting. He encouraged
locals to start new ventures that would
make use of excess electricity in the
daylight and Barpak got its own bakery,
furniture shop, and even a cargo
ropeway.
In 2003 Ghale was made an Ashoka Fellow for his pioneering work with
rural electrification. Today, Ghale’s
company Hygo Energy has set up
micro-hydro plants in Lamjung, Gorkha,
Dhading, Kavre and Lalitpur.

www.barpak.org
Building blocks of reconstruction

Replacing bricks with alternatives that are safer, cheaper, cleaner and faster to build

One of the looming challenges in post-earthquake Nepal has been, and will continue to be, is reconstruction of the estimated 600,000 homes that were destroyed. There are many rebuilding methods that have been proposed using mud, bamboo, and even empty beer bottles. Across the 14 hardest hit districts many who lost their homes are already salvaging bricks and roofing material to rebuild their houses before the rain. In the longer-term, there is expected to be a trend towards reinforced concrete structures since most such buildings survived the quake, while the mud mortar and brick buildings collapsed.

Finding a cheap and environment-friendly alternative to bricks in post-quake reconstruction could solve many problems at once: of safety, environmental protection and cost. Three technologies are already available and only need to be scaled up: rammed earth, compressed bricks and interlocking soil-cement bricks.

Rammed earth

Rammed earth is a building technique that compresses locally-available clay, sand, gravel and some cement into vertical moulds to construct walls. Tamping the wet mixture is done with long ramming poles. Entire walls are built inside the frames, then joined with other panels and beams to build the house. Rammed earth has been used in portions of the Great Wall of China, and in several houses in northern Nepal and Bhutan.

“The main plus point is that it costs one-third less than a normal house, it is environment-friendly and has insulating properties,” explains Nipal Adhikary of the Kathmandu-based Adobe and Bamboo Research Institute (ABARI). Rammed earth has taken on added significance after the earthquake since houses ABARI built with this technology withstood the shaking.

Interlocking bricks

Another solution that combines the strengths of rammed earth and compressed earth blocks is a system of interlocking bricks developed by Nepali inventor, Gyanendra R Sthapit at the Habitech Center of the Asian Institute of Technology in Thailand. The award-winning idea has been used for post-tsunami reconstruction in Thailand in 2008, and after Cyclone Nargis ravaged Burma in 2010 to build more than 1,000 homes, schools, and health clinics.

Says Sthapit: “Due to the huge demand for rebuilding and reconstruction work in Nepal after the earthquake, we are working on how to manufacture equipment in Nepal so that more and more people can benefit from this technology.”

Interlocking bricks can be made at the building site itself by mixing locally available clay with 15 per cent cement and does not need to be fired. The walls are reinforced horizontally and vertically, especially at the joints. A typical three-room house can be built in two weeks because the bricks self-align, and can cost up to 40 per cent less than a conventional brick-cement house.

Habitech’s office in Khumaltar is made using interlocking bricks and suffered no damage in the earthquake. Iswar Joshi of Habitech is busy responding to post-earthquake reconstruction inquiries from schools and individuals, but says the main challenge is to scale-up the technology when there is a shortage of manpower, so it can be used where it is needed the most.

“We are offering to put up the structures on a turnkey basis, or provide the brick press machine and train builders for temporary shelters for now,” says Joshi. “This would create local jobs as the builders can then train others.”

Compressed clay bricks

A manual compactor being used to make Compressed Stabilised Earth Blocks for a school in Bardiya.

An even simpler and cheaper solution for post-earthquake reconstruction are Compressed Stabilised Earth Blocks (CSEB) in which clay is mixed with cement in a 96:4 ratio at the building site itself, and compressed with a manual compactor. The resulting bricks are even stronger than kiln-baked bricks, and because they don’t need furnaces, and it eliminates air pollution, CSEB have been successfully building dozens of schools in the Tarai. Replacing bricks in Kathmandu Valley with CSEB would not only save money, but also try to rid Kathmandu Valley of its air pollution, especially the harmful soot particles below 10 microns which are emitted by brick kilns.

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Pre-built homes

I t is nearing the end of the day, but at the showroom of SB Furniture in Lagankhel, there are still people who have come to enquire about prefab houses. After inspecting a cozy-looking three-room model house, most of them come straight to the point: “How much does this cost?”

A 550 sq ft three-room house made of cement fibre panels costs about Rs 10 million, but owner Sudarshan Joshi (left) says he is not trying to sell the houses for now, but is just showcasing them since emergency relief supplies is the priority for Nepal right now. SB Furniture is donating 29 containers of imported roof tiles for earthquake-affected areas, and is looking for local partners for distribution. The furniture company is also helping rebuild schools and monasteries in Central Nepal.

There does seem to be a high demand for these light and easy-to-build structures for those whose homes were either destroyed or damaged by the earthquake. Joshi was already selling prefab wall panels to high rises in Kathmandu before the disaster, and says the technology is ideal for family homes, government offices and schools in the earthquake-hit areas. They are slightly cheaper than normal brick and cement houses, and there is a range of designs for buildings of various sizes that can be put up in 20 days as a permanent home.

Sonia Awale

The wall of a home made with rammed earth technology can be attractive and safe.
Pralash Khadka and his family have been camping under a tarpaulin for more than a month now even though their single-storey home was hardly damaged. However, a neighbour’s tall house has cracks and looks like it may come down onto his property in the next aftershock.

The damaged house is supported by wooden beams, but that is more for peace-of-mind than structural support. Now, a joint team of the Nepal Army and Armed Police Force along with a technical team from the municipality are here to plan the demolition.

“I am scared the house will fall over mine when they demolish it, but it doesn’t, it is sure to fall on top of us next time there is a major aftershock,” Khadka told us.

“As an excavator poked and pulled the walls and roof of the first floor, the houses on both sides rattled and the electricity pole near the house threatened to collapse. A group of locals halted the demolition saying that the constant shaking would damage the houses nearby. An estimated 50,000 houses in Kathmandu have been affected by the earthquake and its aftershocks, out of which 20,000 have collapsed or are on the verge of it. Many of them are in densely populated areas of Gongabu Buspark, Swayambhu, Balkhu and Kalanki.

“We are demolishing houses that threaten neighbours and also old structures that are damaged,” said Uttar Kumar Regmi of the Kathmandu Metropolitan City. He says old houses without pillars, new high buildings with shutters, buildings without proper design and those built with sub-standard materials were the ones to come down during the earthquake.

Surprisingly, the houses in Kathmandu that were rebuilt after being demolished during the road widening project were not affected by the earthquake. But the government is ill-prepared to carry out large scale demolitions despite dozens of people coming in everyday with applications or complaints about unsafe houses in the neighbourhood. Officials freely admit they just don’t have the technical expertise to carry out controlled demolition on such a scale, especially of high-rise apartments. The municipality is concentrating on highly risky buildings of up to three stories.

“Right now we are using all the available materials but these aren’t enough to demolish higher structures,” said Shiva Hari Sharma, joint secretary of Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD). Earlier this month, the Ministry of Home Affairs formed a committee under Sharma to recommend a plan for demolition. “We have provided a list of equipment we need to demolish high-rise apartments and buildings that are more than three stories high to Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport,” he added.

The Nepal Army, Nepal Police, Armed Police Force and the KMC’s own security staff are using excavators, loader machines, cranes as well as small tools like hammers, drilling machines and concrete cutters for demolition. Narrow roads, low-hanging wires, inexperience in demolition and lack of technical expertise hinder their work.

The Nepal Army has so far demolished 103 concrete houses and many more mud and brick houses in the Valley. For other buildings that are not posing any risk to neighbours, the government is asking the home owners to take the lead and take down the buildings on their own. Sharma said the government needs help from foreign demolition experts with both the expertise and the equipment to demolish tall structures. “If they can come and work for a few weeks, and also train our men, it would be a lot easier and faster,” he added.

Debris management is another headache, and the KMC has designated the old cement quarry in Chobhar as a dumping site. Said Regmi: “While it is sad that so many buildings have gone down, this may also offer an opportunity for us to plan our city better.”
It seems frivolous to write a film review when so many people are still in need of aid: most of us still feel the sickening lurch beneath our feet when the earth moves in the numerous aftershocks that continue to succeed that major earthquake. Even when there aren’t aftershocks, many people report a feeling of dizziness that pervades their movements, clear signs of persisting posttraumatic stress. And yet, as is the way of the world, things must go on.

In the valley, businesses are slowly reopening, and young, fierce activists who have been organising highly effective grassroots relief efforts are having to go back to their full time jobs. Soon, the wave of international media coverage will ebb, and, in the meanwhile, film columns must be submitted.

It is with this caveat in place, that I would like, this week, to review the Wachowskis’ immensely flawed, visually over the top, but viscerally brilliant, space opera Jupiter Ascending – a film, which even in its moments of great silliness, gave me a bit of respite from the horrors of our post earthquake world.

This is perhaps because Andy and Lana (previously Larry) Wachowski, have always excelled at imagining, and in this case re-imagining the truly sublime.

Since their immensely successful Matrix trilogy (1999-2003) ended, the siblings have had a patchy time of it with Speed Racer (2008), an enjoyable, sumptuous but video gamey racing movie; the flawed but commendably ambitious Cloud Atlas (2012) based off of the Marvelous book by David Mitchell; and now Jupiter Ascending - a hodgepodge of a film that combines elements of Star Wars with bizarre intergalactic family drama.

All of these films have suffered from too much focus on the cinematic and too little on the structure, with chronically patchy writing leading to an unfortunate abundance of one note characters (think Keanu Reeves as “Neo”, the hero of The Matrix). While that first series of films did not suffer too much from this lack, Jupiter Ascending is all over the place because of its weak script, something that can never quite be compensated for by stupendous visuals.

Still, if you need to get away from it all, this film might just be your thing. With the lovely, feisty Mila Kunis playing the titular Jupiter, and Channing Tatum her half canine (yes, you read that right) paramour, Caine Wise, not much can really go wrong. In this particular case, despite the clunky but hilarious lapses on the part of Wachowskis, pure star persona saves the day as Jupiter and Caine hurdle through space, trying to save the Earth from crazed meta-humans who would harvest mankind to stay immortal. Ludicrous, I know, but then again, we need to re-introduce some sense of the absurd back into our lives, even if just to stay sane.
Bhuvan Man Shakyia of KMC-15 built three four-storey houses that collapsed and killed 38 people. But the house that he built for his own family is intact. Shakyia is at large.

Most of the buildings that collapsed in Gongabu were built to be rented out, and the landlords never lived in them. They took shortcuts in construction to save cost. Mathiu Mishra, former secretary of Gonda VDC, says, “Most owners live abroad, others rent it out to hotels which add floors when they want, no one cares if it is safe.”

It has been two decades since the building code was passed, but it was never properly enforced. Ram Prakash Poudel at the KMC, it was never properly enforced. Neither the Ministry of Physical Infrastructures and Transport, nor the municipality had the capacity to check the implementation of the building code, how can we expect VDAs to do it?

Benefitting from weak regulation, unscrupulous people have built weak houses and then sold or rented them out.

There is a pattern to all these houses that went down in the quake: they are all high-rise built in narrow spaces, low-quality construction materials with weak designs that flopped regulations. Most tall apartments that violated building codes suffered structural damage, and now have red stickers. Most were built on the city’s outskirts which were VDAs till recently.

Engineer Rajan Suwal says: “No professional engineer would have designed such a tall house as a death trap.”


duch or run?

Pradip Basnyal in Nepal 24 May

- Kalpana Gajurel was preparing for her +2 examination in the front yard of her house in Lalagahun of Rasuwa district. As soon as the earthquake struck, she ran inside and hid under the bed as she was instructed in school. The house collapsed, the bed crushed her.

- Five children who were playing on a rooftop in Kailali of Nuwakot district went running into their house and hid under a bed when the shaking started. All of them were killed.

- Bin Pradhan Shrestha of Aarughat of Gorkha lost his daughter after he wished her a long life on her birthday. His wife and daughter were upstairs when the house started shaking. His daughter didn’t come down saying she had been told to take cover under the bed. The house collapsed, and there was no one to rescue her. When found, she was dead.

Earthquake awareness programs in schools have repeated it over and over again: stand under the door, hide under the desk or bed if there is an earthquake, but do not run. Most of those who ran in last month’s earthquakes lived, but many of those who followed the instructions died.

This has prompted experts to question their emphasis on the Drop, Cover and Hold (DCH) method of earthquake safety. The death toll could also have been much higher if the earthquake had struck during a school day. In fact, DCH takes into consideration several factors like the strength of the structure, the floor in which people are in and how many of them are there. But when only two factors (not to run, and to duck) were emphasised in earthquake awareness programs it did not help save lives. DCH is effective when the roof of the house isn’t too heavy, in houses with concrete pillars, and must importantly, when one can’t reach a safe open space immediately.

Israel has had a policy where equipment to rescue survivors was mobilised immediately for those trapped underneath the rubble took a long time to be removed and are currently serving as shelters for survivors. Even if the earthquake was on a holiday, 44 teachers and 26 students lost their lives (see table, left).

策划, this is the house we destroyed in the war.

Sources & Footnotes

District-wise names of 44 teachers killed by the 25 April earthquake, 24 of them were women.

SINDHUPALCHOK: Gopi Maya Paudel, Nima Sapkota, Pushpa Shakya.
NUWAKOT: Rishi Mahar, Visheshwor Raut, Vishnu Shrestha, Thabt Bahadur Raut.
SWAYAMBHU: Saurav Khadka, Lalit Giri.
GAUCHAR: Purna Giri, Rameshwar Bohara in Gongabu.
KATHMANDU: Bhuwan Man Shakya of KMC-15 built three four-storey houses that collapsed and killed 38 people. But the house that he built for his own family is intact. Shakya is at large.

MOTI dhak: Comrade, this is the house we destroyed in the war.

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MOTI dhak: Comrade, this is the house we destroyed in the war.
This is not how your story should end

Studies show there is a rise in suicide in communities affected by natural disasters

On Monday morning, many people woke up to sad news of the death of former Supreme Court Justice Bharat Raj Upeti. The loss of a loved one is not easy, especially if it is a suicide. The reasons are not yet known, it will be speculated and assumed but never quite confirmed. We may never know the real reason, but the personal tragedy at a time of national tragedy adds a poignancy to the mourning. It also brings forward the importance of awareness and prevention of suicide.

Anjana Rajbhandary

“All in the mind”

“He may have needed help but perhaps could not reach out,” a close friend of Upeti told me. The lawyer was widely admired for his strong will, self-confidence and the quality of always being there for others. “A person lives in his mind and there may have been other issues. Probably the earthquake triggered what was already going on,” the friend said.

Internationally, mental health causes seem to be the reason behind about 90 per cent suicides, and depression has been the biggest risk factor. People who experience such disasters are vulnerable, sometimes the incident takes time to sink in. Such post effects of earthquakes can have a stronger effect on individuals who already had a mental health illness to start with. Many studies show victims and survivors of natural disasters like floods, earthquakes and hurricanes increases post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression that may lead to suicidal thinking.

At first there is initial shock and once people start to resettle back to their old lives, reality hits them showing how much things have changed and how much still needs to be done. It is not easy. Figures also show that the rate of suicides may increase till a year after a natural disaster because of the stress of loans and rebuilding lives.

Disruption of social circles and the loss of loved ones may lead to depression and feeling of hopelessness, which are high risks for suicide. Nepali culture looks down upon mental health illness, stereotypes, and stigmatises it. Many do not ask for help because of a judgmental society. The families of those affected get attacked and scrutinised, and society doesn’t make it easier and this thinking needs to change.

In an increasingly consumer-driven urban setting in Kathmandu, we have to remind ourselves to look beyond ourselves and pay attention to people around us. Do we acknowledge those who need help? Strong social support is the strongest shielding factor against suicide, and this becomes especially important after natural disasters with great loss of life. There needs to be plans for immediate, medium and long-term suicide prevention.

It is important to be empathetic and non-judgmental towards individuals with mental health illness. With awareness, knowledge, treatment and support, most people diagnosed with mental health illness are able to live long healthy lives.

It is necessary to pay attention to oneself and if one feels the need for support, just ask. Also, if you feel someone in your life is struggling, talk to them—don’t think this may just be a phase that will pass because it may not. Losing people, for any reason, is hard: we cannot replace memories. We cannot replace people and we cannot replace memories. But, with awareness and knowledge, we can pay attention to ourselves and others, and be there for each other while preventing suicides. If you have been feeling hopeless and sad, and have had those thoughts, take this as a sign to not give up. Get help. There are people around you who love you and need you. Don’t end your story, because you matter. ☢️

SONIA AWALE in SINDHUPALCHOK

Dilapidated beams hang precariously over the emergency ward, a doctor’s consulting room has a gaping hole, a three-storey ramp for wheel chairs is teetering dangerously. What was left of the Sindhupalchok District Hospital in Chautara after the 25 April earthquake was destroyed in the 12 May aftershock.

More than half the dead and wounded in last month’s earthquake are from this district northeast of Kathmandu. No one here talks about the 12 May tremor as an aftershock, they say Chautara was hit by two big earthquakes. One month later, the district lies in ruins, in village after village outside Chautara people are still too dazed to start rebuilding. People with crutches, or arms in slings sit under trees gazing listlessly at the devastation all around.

Only a maternal child clinic of the hospital is functioning, and the wounded are being treated in a field hospital in the open space of Tundikhel nearby. An excavator is clearing the debris of a mace quarter so that the hospital can reopen in a large tent soon.

“We are racing against time, we need to get the hospital up and running before the rains come,” says Medical Superintendent Sugar Rajbandari. “We are already getting cases of dysentery, we don’t even need a monsoon for outbreaks.”

The damaged hospital is now used as a warehouse for medicines being stockpiled for the epidemics that everyone knows will come. Amidst piles of fallen masonry and dust-covered tables are stacks of oral rehydration salts, IV fluids, zinc tablets, micro-nutritional supplements and peanut paste.

The challenge for Rajbandari is to get these supplies to health posts before the rains destroy roads. Ninety per cent of Sindhupalchok’s 75 health posts are in ruins, hirthing tables and other equipment have been crushed. A female health worker was killed, and many of the over 700 Female Community Health Volunteers (FCHVs) in the district have lost families or homes, and are not in the frame of mind to go back to work (see box, below).

The hospital’s priority is to reach the more vulnerable survivors: pregnant women, young mothers, babies and children. There are an estimated 160,000 pregnant women in the affected districts, and there are already cases of premature deliveries and miscarriages.

UNICEF estimates there are 70,000 under-five children who are at risk of malnutrition. Though food isn’t the most immediate need in many villages compared to the early phase of disaster, families are still not getting adequate nutritious foods. The district’s community radio stations have been crucial in spreading the message about prevention of infections, the importance of sanitation, locating latrines away from water sources and to wash hands.

“The rescue part is nearly over, now we are moving to the relief phase and the monsoon has made everything much more urgent,” says S P Kalaunee of the health group, Possible, that is working with the Ministry of Health and had brought a replacement x-ray machine to Chautara.

In the first three days after 25 April, the hospital treated 3900 patients in tents outdoors. The 20 medical staff worked day and night with help from the Nepali Army. The badly wounded were air lifted to Kathmandu. “We were operating on the living inside tents, while there were 31 bodies outside,” Rajbandari recalls.

“Now we are moving from attending
Kedar Nath Dulal of Kadambas Sub-Health Post has been attending to the injured and sick continuously since two big earthquakes struck Sindhupalchok within two weeks. Those who don’t know him are surprised to learn that Dulal lost his 5-year-old daughter Asika, his home and all his livestock on that fateful day of 25 April. “I fight back my tears and keep myself busy, that is how I cope,” Dulal told us, “at least I have the satisfaction of knowing I have done my best to take care of my fellow-villagers.”

Thousands of health workers and Female Community Health Volunteers (FCHVs) have lost their homes, family members or their health posts. But they are working out of huts that they set up to take care of the wounded. Dulal’s case is tragic and uplifting at the same time. But not everyone is Kedar Nath Dulal. Many FCHVs have been trying to help, but are too traumatised to work. These grassroots health workers are the backbone of Nepal’s rural health, and have been a critical element in Nepal’s achievements in meeting vaccination, maternal and child health targets. Their work will be even more important after the temporary field hospital in Chautara is closed.

“In the long-term, it will take time for FCHVs to get back to work, and this will definitely undermine Nepal’s achievements, especially activities like the Vitamin A program,” Krishna Mijar, the District Health Officer of Rasuwa told us via the phone from Dhunche.

Despite their personal loss, female health volunteers have been taking care of those affected by the earthquake without reward or pay. Says Sindhupalchok District Hospital Superintendent Sagar Rajbhandari: “The least the government could do would be to give the voluntary tents and in rural to boost their morale.”

Sonu Awale in Sindhupalchok

No time to grieve

Solar powered lamps and water purifiers for Nepal Earthquake survivors.

Please spread the world!!

How to electrify earthquake survivors?

The M7.8 devastating earthquake and its aftershocks have flattened buildings, destroyed communities and taken many lives. As dozens of aftershocks continue to hit the area, people are sleeping under tents with no electricity and food supply. Without electricity, there is no light, especially when it gets dark and they cannot charge their mobile phones for communication. There is no clean water as many sources are already contaminated. This monsoon is going to be a rough ride for these communities.

Many of these earthquake-hit villages in Nepal were already without power before earthquake struck on 25th April. Now aftermath earthquake, Nepal Electricity Authority has suffered damage worth $136 million on national grid infrastructure. At least six hydro-power projects under NEA have suffered damages. This means it will take even more time for these affected communities to get power. It is time we start initiatives which are off-grid, low-cost and sustainable to power these communities and bring them back to their normalcy. A solar lamp which can provide lighting and mobile charging for a family living in shelters, costs in an average 3000 nepas. Solar-powered water purifiers can easily filter 20 liters of water every day. We need to focus on these portable, low-cost solar solutions to restore them.

And there are many of their available in Nepali markets.

Ecoprise has started runtoseNepal campaign with its partners 365 Innovations and Urban Studio to raise money to deliver these low-cost solutions to 1000 families in Sindhupalchok, Kavrepalanchok and Nuwakot. We have already distributed over 300 solar lamps in communities. We need your help to raise funds so that we reach more people with clean energy and water. We have already distributed over 300 solar lamps in communities. We need your help to raise funds so that we reach more people with clean energy and water. We have already distributed over 300 solar lamps in communities. We need your help to raise funds so that we reach more people with clean energy and water. We have already distributed over 300 solar lamps in communities. We need your help to raise funds so that we reach more people with clean energy and water.

For more details about how to contribute to the campaign, please visit the website www.ecoprise.org or call 4356392.

Sonia Awale in Sindhupalchok
Time to prey
Escaped traffickers are back in business luring quake survivors with promises of a better life for their children

BHRIKUTI RAI
IN SINDHUPALCHOK

Sunita Lama was in Kathmandu sorting out earthquake relief supplies at her office when she heard that dozens of prisoners had escaped when the walls of the Sindhupalchok District Prison collapsed. Among them were Sukhman Dong and Kaila BK who had been sentenced to 16 years in prison in 2012 after a court found them guilty of trafficking young Nepali girls to India. Lama was one of them, and now she is worried that the traffickers will go back to their profession of selling Nepali girls to India. “I am worried for my family and my other trafficked girls,” she says. “I ran from the brothel risking my life, because we knew that if we were caught we would be killed,” says Lama, who was also the victim of trafficking.

United against trafficking

Ga Karki was only 15 when a labour recruiter in Sindhupalchok got her a passport and took her to Lebanon in 2006 and promised her a job in Lebanon. But when she reached Delhi she was brought to a brothel in Agra where she spent two horrifying years before escaping to Nepal. She received shelter and support at Shakti Samuha and along with five other trafficked girls filed a case against Sukhman Dong, Kaila BK, Bajir Singh and others.

Shakti Samuha in Kathmandu who helped Lama after her escape from India says the police have been alerted to provide security to families who had testified. It is also important that the traffickers will go back to trafficking. “It is a coincidence that the hardest hit districts in the earthquake are those from where young Nepali girls have traditionally been trafficked and where criminals have worked hand-in-glove with local politicians: Sindhupalchok, Nuwakot and Kavre,” says the organisation.

The ban will minimise the risk of child trafficking,” said the CCWB’s Tarak Dhital last week. “There are already fake orphanages being set up in earthquake-hit villages and we want to stop that.

Next Generation Nepal (NGN) which helps reintegrate rescued children has been working in Sindhupalchok with the District Child Welfare Board to keep tabs on the movement of children and spread awareness about trafficking. NGN has found 50 children who lost parents in Sindhupalchok alone, and they are all living with extended families.

Activists fear that families whose lives have been turned upside down in villages and in tents will be vulnerable to traffickers enticing them with promises of better lives for the children.

“Towards the end of conflict, there was a rise in orphanage trafficking and the emergency situation after earthquake might trigger a similar flow,” says Martin Punaks of NGN. “Families are desperate for help, there are more donations for quake victims, so traffickers have a greater incentive to separate children from their families.”

Names have been changed.