Six weeks after the earthquake, the ground has gradually stopped shaking but political tremors in the capital have spread uncertainty about the lifespan of the government while it is preparing for a donor meeting on 25 June.

The National Planning Commission is putting finishing touches to its needs assessment report and has recommended that a new Reconstruction Authority be led by the prime minister. The international community is still hesitant because of doubts about transparency and accountability.

Meanwhile, at Singha Darbar urgent closed door meetings held this week were not to expedite emergency relief to the mountains before the rains, but about regime change and who gets to be in the new government. The four top parties want to rush through a constitution to pave the way for Prime Minister Koirala to step down, make way for the UML’s KP Oli and a government of national reconstruction. Most of the bargaining, we hear, is about plum posts in the new cabinet. Politicians see the crisis not just as a way to command huge budgets, but also to redeem some of their lost popularity.
The earthquake was not unexpected, but it could have been far worse. It was a rehearsal for the really big ones to come.

There are two things we can now say about the deadly earthquake that struck Central Nepal on 25 April. The damage relating to traffic, loss of life and property: a) it was not a surprise, and b) it could have been far worse. Himalayan seismologists agree that the quakes did not sufficiently release seismic strain built up during this earthquake and that we should push to be better prepared for the really big ones to come.

Relief work is going on, supplies haven’t reached many remote settlements and hospitals are still having to cope with the backing of wounded. So, it may still be a bit premature to analyse the response to the disaster by the state, the international community, non-governmental groups and individuals to this disaster. Even so, some lessons could also have a bearing on ongoing relief and help streamline it before the rains arrive mid-month.

For about 10 years before the earthquake, scientists and international agencies had been warning the Nepal government to step up preparedness, set up a Disaster Management Authority, start retrofitting schools and hospitals. Alarm bells were ringing just about how unprepared we were to a disaster that everyone knew was coming. During the 1996-2006 conflict, Nepal was turned into a day-to-day disaster of war, and earthquakes were not a priority. Since 2006, the constitution, peace process and post-conflict reconstruction had kept the day-to-day disaster of war, and earthquakes were not a priority. Since 2006, the constitution, peace process and post-conflict reconstruction had kept the government on a tightrope, transmitting from top to bottom, coordinating incoming assistance. As it turned out, the politicians vanished, and the Nepal Army stepped in to play the coordinating role. This is an essential lesson in international disaster preparedness, so they can respond even faster to save more lives, and be more cost-effective than international rescuers.

The April quake and aftershocks in May only partially released the energy stored under Kathmandu, and the ruptures flared up south of the Valley. There is still a potential for another quake in Central Nepal, and there will be a ‘seismic gap’ in western Nepal that hasn’t seen a major quake in 800 years. Both will be even more disastrous than what we have just been through, with the city’s reinforced concrete structures not able to withstand the shocks.

What we have seen was just a warning to be better prepared, a rehearsal for even bigger quakes to come.

**BETWEEN ROCKS**

Well said and it is a sad truth: ‘Rock and a hard place’, Bidushi Dhungel, [760]. But must build trust and need to find a way to engage. Nepal needs help now more than ever before.

**Bishow Parajuli**

- You are insulting a great many British people when you write Joanna Lumley ‘worked tirelessly as an individual’. Ms Lumley was the marketing face of a national appeal in the UK media and millions of UK citizens personally donated money, so give them some credit.
- The earthquake was not unexpected, but it could have been far worse. It was a rehearsal for the really big ones to come.
- Himalayan seismologists agree that the quakes did not sufficiently release seismic strain built up during this earthquake and that we should push to be better prepared for the really big ones to come.
- Reliance work is going on, supplies haven’t reached many remote settlements and hospitals are still having to cope with the backing of wounded. So, it may still be a bit premature to analyse the response to the disaster by the state, the international community, non-governmental groups and individuals to this disaster. Even so, some lessons could also have a bearing on ongoing relief and help streamline it before the rains arrive mid-month.
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- What we have seen was just a warning to be better prepared, a rehearsal for even bigger quakes to come.

**POLITICAL AFTERSHOCKS**

If Baburam Bhattarai is to head the next government, it is a challenge to not be seen by the international community as a ‘political appointee’. If Baburam Bhattarai is to head the next government, it is a challenge to not be seen by the international community as a ‘political appointee’.

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**Amna Nam**

- We don’t have a government, all we have is a network of corrupt political parties.
- Manish Lal Kamarcharya

**MOVEMENT TRACKER**

Tracking cellphone data should be the last resort to get such data: ‘Where are we?’, Ayesha Shaky, [760]. Moreover, Noel has a history of not following guidelines.

**Souj Dhungel**

- Reply from Erik Metters: ‘It is important to follow the guidelines of the mobile industry association. It is a principle that mobile operators have to abide by. The mobile operators have their own rules and regulations. If you violate these rules, you could be blocked from using your mobile phone.’
- Following rocks: ‘TikTok is a social networking app that allows users to create and share short-form video content. The app is known for its creative challenges and dance videos.’
- Moving story: ‘A BC government official has called for an investigation into the use of TikTok by government employees.
- S Korea

**S Kolly**

- What can be done to extend the duty free status for goods and CIG sheets that are so desperately needed in the tourism centers? ‘Tourists do not have to pay the duty on CIG sheets. Can’t the government extend the duty free status until after everyone has temporary shelter?’
- Tanya Moser: ‘The announcement of the duty free status for tents and other relief materials is a welcome step forward in the effort to provide aid to those affected by the earthquake.
- The government has made a commitment to provide relief aid to those affected by the earthquake. The duty free status will help ensure that aid is delivered in a timely manner.
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**Sindur Raskin**

- Excellent roundup of the situation in the worst-affected district that has half the casualties and homeless: ‘When it rains, it pours’, Sonia Awale, [760]. As the author rightly points out, the main challenge now is to protect the hardest hit areas.
- LaSherrah Jackson: ‘This is a sad day for all of us. We are all in this together, and we must come together to support our fellow humans during this difficult time.’
- Jenn

**Jens Starks**

- A foolish decision by the Western Regional Hotel Association to slash rates - totally contrary to PATA Guidance; a decision taken in unseemly haste by a network of local co-operatives.
- PATA Guidance: ‘Hotels should consider a graduated approach to discounting rates, including a discount of 20% for stay periods of 1-3 nights, 30% for 4-7 nights, and 40% for 8-14 nights.’

**Rick D Starks**

- Most liked on Facebook [Nepal452 by Ayesha Shaky (11 likes)]
- Most shared on Facebook [Where have all the tourists gone? by Bishow Parajuli (11 shares)]
- Most popular on Twitter [Where have all the tourists gone? by Bishow Parajuli (11 retweets, 94 favourites)]
- Most visited online page [Quake from space by Aprak Patel (13 views)]
- Most commented [weeklyinternetpoll761 by Bishow Parajuli (15 comments)]
- Most commented [weeklyinternetpoll762 by Bishow Parajuli (15 comments)]
Hundreds of thousands of people across 15 districts affected by the April earthquake are still awaiting food, shelter and medicines. But what are they discussing in the corridors of power in Singha Darbar these days? Who gets to be the next prime minister and when.

A national crisis of this magnitude should have put the government and its agencies at its efficient best and united political forces across the spectrum. But politics is a hard ball game of power, and crisis provide all an opportunity to make political capital.

All the Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal had to do was stoke KP Oli’s ambition to become prime minister to change the current discourse of Nepali politics. Prime Minister Sushil Koirala’s own goal may have been to be at the helm when the constitution is drafted, take credit for it and then make a graceful exit. But the earthquake has shaken things up. The Maoists sniff advantage that putting an ailing Oli in power will open opportunities for them because they know Comrade KP is a man in a hurry. However, sections of the NC see no reason to handover to Oli right now since the gentleman’s agreement was that Koirala will step down only after the constitution.

Which is why they are now racing the clock to try to ram through a constitution. But what about that? A national reconstruction government led by Oli has set off competition for power sharing. The long-term political capital to be gained during this period means everybody wants just a little bigger share of the pie. With local elections looking probable by the end of the year, there is force competition for powerful ministerial berths.

The NC, UML and the opposition Maoist-Madhesi alliance have intensified in the past few days, most kinks in the constitution are being ironed out. Unlike in the past, federalism and the governance are not the sticking points anymore. The eagerness shown by the Maoists and a section of Madhesi alliance to jump into Oli’s bandwagon means that Maoists do not see their stance on statute yielding them any political brownie points. Instead, a visible role in the national reconstruction government may just be what Dahal and his comrades are looking for to regain lost political stature.

A senior NC leader told me this week: everybody wants to get the constitution over and done with. Sushil Koirala wants to take credit and cash it in the coming party convention. Sher Bahadur Deuba wants Oli out of power before the convention to give himself a fair chance. Oli can’t wait to be PM, Madhav Nepal is backing Oli because that would fulfil his dream wish to head the UML.

By standing up for inclusive federalism, the Maoists and the Madhesis were fighting for their share of political credit in the statute drafting. But, being in a national reconstruction government is a much more attractive proposition now. The NC and UML also seem to have realised that bringing the opposition into a national government is the best way to ensure local elections.

Some sections within the Maoist-Madhesi alliance will caution the leadership against joining the government at the moment, but pragmatism may prevail. Or, call it opportunism.

Whatever remains will soon run out after the government starts distributing cash compensation next week. The government sees the 25 June Donor summit (see page 4) as an opportunity to convince donors to contribute to the PM Relief Fund. But the brewing humanitarian crisis in Syria, Iraq and several parts of Africa will leave Nepal at the bottom of the donors’ priority list. So, the best chance we have for funding this long term reconstruction is to get the economy back in shape, which will require a stable government.

The aftershocks may have stopped shaking of the crust beneath our feet, but we still stand on shaky political terrain.

The estimated costs for reconstructing the quake hit economy are already running into billions – of dollars. But it is an indication of the lack of credibility of the government that contributions to the Prime Minister’s Relief Fund have been disappointing.

LET'S REBUILD NEPAL

“Coming together is a beginning; Keeping together is progress; Working together is success.” — Henry Ford

As one of our CSR initiatives, we are building 100 houses for Nepal Earthquake victims in 100 days.
“We need help to rebuild Nepal”

The government is hosting an international fund-raising conference for long-term reconstruction on 25 June in Kathmandu. Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat, who is busy planning for the meeting, spoke to Nepali Times on Tuesday after briefing members of the international community.

Excerpts:

Nepali Times: What was the response of donors you met yesterday?
Ram Sharan Mahat: I am happy with the way they showed readiness to support us in the reconstruction. The Japanese government is willing to co-host the conference, which we are very pleased about. They also promised to ensure high-level ministerial participation in the conference.

What were their main concerns?
Their main concerns were transparency, accountability and effectiveness. They do not want any hassles in the conference.

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What is the most important decision you are making at the moment?
We are preparing for a Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) report, which should be ready in two months. This document will lay out our priorities, and it will offer sectors that donors can pledge assistance to. We will define broad areas where we need their assistance. And depending on their own priorities and advantages, they can help with reconstruction of individual houses, government buildings, health facilities, schools or monasteries.

What are you doing to ensure that aid is not tied as it is tied in Nepal?
It will depend on how we design our projects, and it will be a led reconstruction project. They might also have their own areas of interest like health, education and livelihoods, but they will have to choose from priorities, we pay out in the PDNA report.

Do we have a ballpark figure for the money needed for post-earthquake reconstruction?
Ram Sharan Mahat: The UN has said that the figure for reconstruction would be $8 billion. The Japan government said that the amount is not as important as how large, will come.

Is money an issue?
Yes, money is an issue. Problem, particularly for rebuilding individual houses. Donors can help rebuild infrastructure, government buildings or monuments but there would be difficult to ask them to provide cash grants for reconstruction of individual houses. We will have to care of that.

What can we do to revive tourism, are you thinking of waiving visas to encourage tourists to visit Nepal?
Visa are not a problem. Tourist can get visa on arrival. Our, they are facing delay in immigration, and that is unlikely to improve with the existing management. What’s wrong in foreign company that is efficient and can improve our immigration procedures?

Will the formation of a national unity government as proposed by the UML and the CPN (M) affect reconstruction work?
It is hard to tell, but what we can say is: the focus will be on rebuilding individual houses. Donors can help rebuild infrastructure, government buildings or monuments but they would be difficult to ask them to provide cash grants for reconstruction of individual houses. We will have to care of that.
Now that the date and venue for the donor conference for earthquake rebuilding have been fixed, we have three weeks to figure out how exactly the international community can help in Nepal’s reconstruction.

**GUEST COLUMN**

**Bihari K Shrestha**

Despite chronic failures of successive governments as well as ad hoc donor policies, Nepal is known around the world for two effective home-grown innovations: the dramatic resurgence of forest cover for two effective home-grown innovations: the Himalaya. The Ministry of Forests, Nepal is known around the world for its policies, Nepal is known around the world for its dramatic resurgence of forest cover.

In 1980, there were catastrophic predictions about the denudation of the Himalaya. The Ministry of Forests, which was corrupt to the core as it is now, doggedly refused to allow local communities to manage their own forests. In 1987, when I was at the National Planning Commission, a World Bank mission came to town to decide on a $50 million Structural Adjustment Loan. They came to my office, and I was able to impressed on the team that user management of forests should be a conditionality for the loan.

That did the trick. Therefore, the Finance Ministry forced the Ministry of Forests to amend ground rules so that Forestry User Groups would be allowed to manage community forests. Today there are some 18,000 user groups and they are behind the success of Nepal’s community forestry program. I used to tell World Bank visitors later that while the Bank supported many projects in Nepal, only one of them was really successful. And it didn’t cost the Bank even one cent.

The second domestic innovation was the formation of Ama Samuha (Mothers’ Groups) and their Female Community Health Volunteers in 1988, which now has 52,000 volunteers and have been primarily responsible for Nepal’s dramatic improvements in maternal and infant mortality rates. Agencies like USAID, UNICEF and UNFPA were involved in backstopping various components of this initiative. Donor funding for the program was, of course, vital but what made it successful was that it was a Nepali innovation implemented by Nepal on the ground.

Despite the persistence of feudalistic order at the local level, the reason Forestry User Groups and Mothers’ Groups were successful was that the beneficiaries were themselves participants, and despite their caste, class and gender were involved in decision-making. This ensured transparency of management that, in turn, made it imperative for their leaders to be accountable.

The on-going tragedy for Nepal, however, is that despite the “reformations” of our “democracy” for the last quarter of a century, three success stories were rarely replicated in other areas of development. The government and donors would do well to heed the lessons of these successful experiences when they meet this month to plan earthquake relief.

Money is not as important as accountability and ownership.

Contrary to its textbook definition, Nepal’s democracy has constantly and increasingly been the government of the corrupt, for the corrupt and by the corrupt. No political leaders of any stripe have ever been able to address various political gatherings and I tell my audiences that Nepal society continues to remain feudalistic in nature and this manifests itself through aspirational leadership with high caste accompanied by relative wealth being the main determinant. This entire superstructure is sustained and reinforced by extraction of resources without accountability.

Nearly all leaders in Nepal at all levels of governance have feudal backgrounds and mindsets, regardless of the party they belong to. For them, corruption is only one of the several means of extraction of resources from society and therefore most successful politicians in Nepal are necessarily corrupt. These words would often be greeted with resounding, but slightly nervous, laughter from the politicians present. But no one disagreed. This system is often aided, abettled and propped up by donors. Despite 70 years of foreign aid, Nepal remains impoverished, our young are leaving in droves, and now we have the challenge of rebuilding a ravaged land. From past experience, the place to start would be to strengthen the inherent resilience of local communities to deal with the disaster.
Newfound empathy
Nepali journalists on the disaster with compassion, others not so much

One of the most moving pieces of reporting to come out of the 25 April earthquake has been from Al Jazeera’s Nepal correspondent Sulagna Shrestha who broke down on camera mid-report while recounting the devastation of her hometown, Patan Darbar Square, a day after the quake.

“Every morning I hope it was a nightmare, but it’s not,” says Shrestha, her back turned to the camera. “Nepal has no choice but to rebuild, and hopefully I can do it better next time.”

Many of us who grew up in the city, have homes and families here, and were out on field the very next day of the quake have felt the exact same emotions that made Shrestha, an experienced journalist tear up. We can’t help but wonder what it must have been like for those reporting on a disaster like the earthquake that hit Nepal on 25 April.

For the first seven days, as videos and photographs of a devastated city were broadcast around the world on tv and the internet, our family, my friends, frantic calls from relatives all over the world, questions about our homes and families, the destruction and aftermath. We didn’t realize it but our homes and families were our job. Witnessing destruction is never easy, not even for a journalist, but it becomes terribly hard not to get affected when it involves reporting on a place you have spent your entire life in.

Collapsed temples in Patan, Bhaktapur, and Basantapur didn’t just add up to statistics for us. These were places where we often met friends for tea discussing the future, career goals, relationship troubles. The 8,700 people who lost their lives were not abstract.

Perhaps this is why reports produced by Nepali journalists have been more sensitive and empathetic in their approach than usual. Unlike foreign reporters who had little idea of the country’s geography, culture and customs, and who couldn’t place Nepal on a map at the quake, we understood the nuances and had more insight.

When we knew better than to ask a wailing wife who had just found out about her husband’s death “How do you feel?”. Or a grieving person: “Why are you in all-white and sharing your head?” We didn’t have our reservations about taking pictures of mass funerals at Pasupatinath that had become mandatory for many international photographers.

Even times Natchitwong couldn’t resist the temptation to make a stop there on his two-day visit.

The previous distinction between the subject of our stories was suddenly blurred. We were all earthquake-affected. Some of us lost our homes, some their workplaces, and some their lives.

Journalism schools teach you detachment, that empathy hides objectivity. Even if we transmit compassion through our journalism, we can be as detached from the subject. Our aim is to seek to understand the other, not support or oppose. It also becomes equally important to give empathy that we naturally tend to have for survivors to all others. Empathy, in fact, enhances the credibility of our reporting.

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The challenge now is to keep the empathy we showed on Nepal when another disaster strikes. Not another earthquake, but when the monsoon rains in July-August trigger landslides on mountains destabilised by the tremors.

Soon it was time to leave and travel to another disaster zone. Many, including Natchitwong and other Nepali reporters of foreign correspondents, left by the time the aftershock hit on 12 May, destroying homes already in ruins from the first time quake. Three districts that had escaped relatively unscathed the first time were now devastated. But the foreign correspondents who’d remained in Nepal by this time were now frustrated that their coverage was more comprehensive.

In the weeks that followed though reports were coming in of horrific: damage in Dokalabkhadi district, the monster earthquake of Kathmandu yesterday’s news. Although many correspondents tried to get more minutes on air, the media had moved on to the UK elections, Syria, Yemen and Iraq. The media, after the early hype, had moved on to disproportionate coverage. Facts do not add up to the truth when we are selective in choosing what to report. Facts, in fact, can lie.

Similarly, when the scale of the disaster is too big, the world only hurts when the screen is just not wide enough to show the immensity of an avalanche that has destroyed a village of 500 inhabitants.

Words are not enough, visuals are not enough.

The tremors that struck on 12 May brought back Langtang on 25 April, or to the settlement of Chautara during the 12 May aftershock. The challenge now is to keep the empathy we showed on Nepal when another disaster strikes. Not another earthquake, but when the monsoon rains in July-August trigger landslides on mountains destabilised by the tremors.

Villages need to be relocated, shelters need to be built, food needs to be provided for at least three million people in the danger zone. Relief supplies need to reach the remote valleys. There are 25,000 schools damaged or destroyed, 1,700 hospitals have been destroyed. Health posts and hospitals are barely coping with the wounded. They don’t have the resources to beyond comprehension: 600,000 homes were destroyed.

Analyse the situations, as the monsoon trigger landslides and a silent emergency of epidemics and diseases that are on the back. It has left, and with it the headlines that keep the crisis alive. Already, donations for relief and rehabilitation have started tapering off. A piece of news was originally published on the BBC’s College of Journalism blog.
It’s official: the monsoon is delayed. I heard that the Fidaa vested as we get to press on Thursday, which is one week behind schedule. Things may spring up in the Bay of Bengal, but the winds are just not holding up. A heatwave over northern India has eased somewhat, and the expected pre-monsoon showers have been dissipated by the high temperatures. Kathmandu will be hot, hot, hot for a while longer.

FRIDAY SATURDAY

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SUNDAY

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SUNDAY

HOUSES DOWN, RENTS UP

The housing crisis in Kathmandu has become much more acute after the earthquake

SAHINA SHRESTHA

For the past one month Sita Timilsina’s daily routine has been the same. She wakes up in the morning, gets ready, then boards a micro van to yet another neighbourhood in Kathmandu looking for a room to rent. She has had no luck.

Most of the houses she has checked out have cracks and others that look safe charge steep prices. There is almost nothing in between: safe and affordable.

“It is impossible and I have looked everywhere,” said Timilsina, the frustration evident in her voice. Before the earthquake Timilsina paid Rs 4,500 for a three-room apartment, now the minimum price for a dingy room is Rs 10,000.

So, Timilsina and her brother have no recourse but to continue living in a tent in Tundikhel. The house in Asan where the siblings shared a rented flat was reduced to rubble on the 25 April quake.

Timilsina is now expanding her search to the outskirts of Kathmandu and was on her way to Kadaghati when we met her. She agrees it will be a long commute to work but is ready to lease the space if the price is appropriate.

“What else can we do? We can’t live under a tent forever,” she said.

The shortage of rental space in Kathmandu has affected businesses too. Kritagya Shrestha, owner of a web design company, was forced to relocate to his house after his office building was structurally damaged. “I contacted many brokers and even went through online directories and rental companies but I couldn’t find a proper space. I had no option but to move it home,” Shrestha told Nepal Times.

According to the National Population and Housing Census, over 300,000 housing units were rented out in the Valley in 2011. More than half the households in the capital rent their living space, and the earthquake destroyed over 70,000 houses in the Valley and damaged 60,000. This has left a lot of people homeless.

Kathmandu CDO Ek Narayan Aryal admits the problem of rental space in the Valley is huge. “Home owners moving out of highrise apartments to smaller houses has further deepened the problem,” says Aryal.

Although the government has no policies to accommodate people living in tents, Aryal suggests it may be a good idea to lease public spaces to private companies to build pre-fabricated houses for the displaced.

Landlords are also taking advantage of the vulnerable. One woman was asked to pay two months’ rent even though it is so unsafe she can’t even go into the damaged flat to collect her belongings.

“The house has big cracks and the floors shake every time someone goes in, and he expects us to pay the rent,” she said. “I asked him for more time but he told me to leave the room.”

Tulasa Kunwar is not sure where she will go if she has to move out of the tent in Tundikhel. Her landlord has asked her to move out because his relatives need the rooms. Going back to her house in Kavre is out of the question because it is damaged too.

Earlier in May the Ministry of Home Affairs directed CDOs to take legal action against house owners found increasing rents or harassing tenants. Those found guilty will be charged according to the Black Marketing Act, which dictates a maximum punishment of a Rs 2,000 fine and six months in prison, which the homeless say is hardly a deterrent.

As expected, the CDO offices have received only a handful of complaints.

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The housing crisis in Kathmandu has become much more acute after the earthquake

Kathmandu CDO Ek Narayan Aryal admits the problem of rental space in the Valley is huge. “Home owners moving out of highrise apartments to smaller houses has further deepened the problem,” says Aryal.

Although the government has no policies to accommodate people living in tents, Aryal suggests it may be a good idea to lease public spaces to private companies to build pre-fabricated houses for the displaced.

Landlords are also taking advantage of the vulnerable. One woman was asked to pay two months’ rent even though it is so unsafe she can’t even go into the damaged flat to collect her belongings.

“The house has big cracks and the floors shake every time someone goes in, and he expects us to pay the rent,” she said. “I asked him for more time but he told me to leave the room.”

Tulasa Kunwar is not sure where she will go if she has to move out of the tent in Tundikhel. Her landlord has asked her to move out because his relatives need the rooms. Going back to her house in Kavre is out of the question because it is damaged too.

Earlier in May the Ministry of Home Affairs directed CDOs to take legal action against house owners found increasing rents or harassing tenants. Those found guilty will be charged according to the Black Marketing Act, which dictates a maximum punishment of a Rs 2,000 fine and six months in prison, which the homeless say is hardly a deterrent.

As expected, the CDO offices have received only a handful of complaints.
When the mountain

Helping Hands: James Watson, Gareth Pickering and Richard Jones (left) came to trek in Nepal, but decided to stay on to help in the earthquake relief work (above).

different. Some need tents, some are desperate for food, others require tin roofs and building tools like saws, shovels and hammers. Many just need help to clear the rubble. Through their Nepali friends and people they met, they found out about a village in Sindhupalchok where people in a shelter had no food. They immediately bought thirty 30kg sacks of rice, loaded it onto a truck and set off. While in that village they heard of one that needed medicines and shelter, so they rushed back to Kathmandu to buy those items and delivered them the next day.

It has been incredible to see how people from all over the world are working together across boundaries, no one is competing for credit,” said Pickering. Although the effort has been ad hoc, it is among hundreds of examples of Nepali and foreign individuals who have joined hands to help. For example, when they saw the overwhelming need for shelter in the villages they visited the trio ordered 370 tarps, and spent the next four days trying to get it out of customs.

The very next day, 200 tarps were dispatched to Dolakha, and Jones and James Watson went to the village of a trekking guide they had met where many homes had been destroyed.

“It may be a drop in the ocean, but we are trying to make an impact with every dollar we get,” said Watson, who has been brain-storming with his friends about what they can do for Nepal in the long-term.

Since the three have headed out of their love for photography, they have come up with the idea of bringing out a picture book on Nepal to be published and sold worldwide. Images from the earthquake will depict the tragedy, but also the generosity and resilience of the Nepali people, and also include the landscape and portraits of Nepalis.

Watson: “We have seen some great pictures by Nepali photographers, and we encourage them to send in their images and we will pick the best to be included in the book.” All proceeds from the sale of the photobook will go to support long-term reconstruction and rehabilitation of the earthquake-ravaged districts.

Kunda Dixit

Back in Advanced Base Camp we learned that the earthquake had been widespread but were limited to the details by an almost complete lack of communications. It wasn’t until our evacuation from the mountain and arrival back in Kathmandu on 5 May that I began to realise the full scale of the disaster. I’d only heard about the tragedy on Everest but hadn’t prepared myself for the bigger picture. It was overwhelming, at scale unprecedented to my senses and any previous frame of reference.

My first day back in Kathmandu was an emotional

Helping Hands: James Watson, Gareth Pickering and Richard Jones (left) came to trek in Nepal, but decided to stay on to help in the earthquake relief work (above).

I was tired but content. I took a sip of water and looked down at my watch. 11.55am. My ears picked up a faint, deep rumbling sound that broke the silence and sparked an almost animal-like instinct. Something wasn’t right. The rumbling continued, louder and louder.

In what felt like an eternity, the seismic shifts came. We huddled next to a rock, our eyes darting in all directions, hugging each other, terrified, praying that the rumbling and shaking would stop.

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Art aid for Nepal

There have been many ways the world is helping Nepal in its time of need, and one of them is how artists in London have got together to sell postcards made by noted artists.

The Kathmandu Contemporary Arts Centre (KCAC) organised an exhibition of the postcards titled Thinking of You on 21 May in London’s The House of Illustration.

“Artists who want to help can donate a piece of artwork and buyers can end up with a wonderful work of art,” said Celina Washington of KCAC who brought together the artists who donated their work.

The postcards were sold for £50 each, and all the money raised will go to support earthquake relief operations in Nepal. Over 100 artists took part in the project including Richard Long and Antony Gormley.

Subash Thebe, a Nepali artist studying at St Martins School of Art in London, also donated his work to Thinking of You because he said he was moved to help people back home in any way he could. “As an artist, it was the perfect platform to lend my support,” said Thebe, who did his artist residency at KCAC’s studio in Patan last summer.

On 12 May I was in Kathmandu assisting with this relief work when the second earthquake struck with a magnitude 7.3. Being on a mountain for the first time, the buildings rolled over a mountain walking through the rubble and dust of the once familiar streets and past ancient monuments. Concerned for my wellbeing, family and friends demanded I return home. But going home would mean turning my back on a country that had been devastated by devasting earthquakes.

I’ve since travelled and distributed relief to areas that I didn’t even know existed, seen the destruction wrought by a powerful earthquake and met more incredibly inspiring, resilient people than I’ve ever thought possible.

On the ground relief work has opened my eyes to the scale of the disaster: many villages still look like a war zone. Buildings til at vertiginous angles, a door or window visible through a twisted mess of corrugated iron. Brown dust drifts over the disintegrated remains of once proud homes. I’ve seen vast piles of milled rubble and the outstretched arms of the vulnerable.

This week, we distributed relief to a community in Dolakha. Last week I travelled to Khumbu to deliver financial aid to 234 families in Thame, and delivered aid to a community in Dolakha. Over the past month we’ve distributed over a thousand tents and tarps, thousands of kg of food, and provided extensive financial support. I’ve seen more of the country and met more incredibly inspiring, resilient people than I’ve ever thought possible.

Amid the long, deep cracks and between the rubble, I’ve also found something to be positive about for the longer-term future of the country. This is the initiative and energy of Nepal’s youth which is rapidly gaining momentum: a groundswell which will bring greater and longer-lasting change than the devastating earthquakes.

Sometimes I forget that I originally came to Nepal in early April to climb mountains. Little did I know when I arrived that these mountains would be more proverbial than real. The people that I’ve met, the things I’ve seen and the lessons learned have been more impactful than any summit I’ve ever attempted, stood on or dreamed about.

Heather Geluk is a Canadian climber. peoplesyoumetsblog’98.blogspot.com

Thinking of You was a secret exhibition as signatures of the artists were on the back of the artwork and the public didn’t know whose art they were buying. “We have extended the online sale indefinitely and will continue adding artwork when it is donated by artists,” said Washington.

The money collected during Thinking of You is dedicated to supporting artists and art projects in Nepal affected by the earthquake, and KCAC will publish the amount of money raised and the list of supported projects on its website.

Among the activities supported is the Rebuilding Bungamati Project launched by artist Sujan Chitrakar of Kathmandu University School of Art. Thinking of You is also helping artist Milan Rai and his team of volunteers who have been organising clean-ups, and building toilets.

KCAC has recently been added to the list of supported projects.

As a long term goal, Chitrakar aims at establishing Bungamati as a unique destination for art and culture. KCAC will also support the Rebuilding Bungamati’s outreach program. “This would be to conduct art classes in four schools and engage students in disseminating hope,” says Chitrakar.
Radio active after the earthquake

Community radio stations were destroyed by the earthquake, but many are still on air.

SONIA AWALE
in SINDHUPALCHOK

The studio clock at the fifth-floor studio of Chautara’s Radio Sindhu was coming up to 11:56AM on 25 April. Announcer Ashma Syangtan of the popular Ramailo Selo program was introducing the last folk song before the noon news bulletin. Technician Guras Gurung was adjusting the sound levels on her console.

Suddenly, everything started shaking violently. Syangtan stopped mid-sentence. Computer monitors fell, the walls started cracking and there was dust everywhere.

“I immediately knew it was an earthquake,” Syangtan recalled, “we rushed out of the studio but the shaking was so strong that we had difficulty descending the five stories.”

Syangtan and Gurung saw debris and dust everywhere, frightened people and lots of STUDIO DISCUSSION:

Ashma Syangtan (right, above) was presenting her Ramailo Selo program on Radio Sindhu at 11:56 on 25 April when the earthquake struck. Tika Dahal (left) was getting ready to present the noon news bulletin. Both are now in a tent studio.

Rebuilding communities with

Radio helps make relief distribution and post-earthquake recovery more transparent, accountable and responsive.

MANISHA ARYAL
in SINDHUPALCHOK

Sitting on mismatched mattresses inside the tent that houses Radio Sindhu’s transmitter, desktop, mixer, microphone, and telephone hybrid, Station Manager Ratna Prasad Shrestha points down to the three-storey building that was once a vibrant radio station.

The station’s antenna, perched precariously atop a 3-storey building in Chautara broadcast to Sindhupalchok and Kavre districts before the earthquakes. Even now, it towers above all else in Chautara and is a testimony to media’s reach in the Nepali hinterland.

Information and communication are ‘critical need items’ and their absence prevents disaster survivors from accessing services and making the best decisions for themselves. The earthquake gives us a chance to assess Communication with Communities (CwC) and take stock of how far Nepal has come since the first independent FM radio station went on air in 1996. Without this, any intervention involving radio as a CwC tool will be off-target and ineffective.

Within hours of the first quake, Radio Sindhu staff rushed into the station, grabbed a few broadcast essentials from inside the damaged building, and set up camp in a clearing overlooking the Tundikhel. A thin bamboo pole now serves as the station’s antenna.

Shrestha wants to go in and retrieve the remaining equipment, a larger 5 kVA backup, field recorders, microphones, some furniture, etc. But the Nepal Army has declared the building unsafe and advised him not to go back in. Before the quake, Radio Sindhu had 12 paid staff and six volunteers. Shrestha does not know how long he can ask his staff to continue working without pay, and the volunteers have stopped coming.

Radio Sindhu takes roughly an hour of content each day from Kathmandu-based production houses. The remaining 17 hours is produced by local reporters. While professionally produced content from Kathmandu fill a few slots, it is the local reporters and local programs that are the core content of the stations in the earthquake-affected districts. The best investment in CwC is to directly support
wounded. People were wailing, and trying to dig into the ruins of their houses with their bare hands. Bodies lined the streets, the wounded were being carried off to the hospital.

"Almost every building on our street collapsed," Gurung said, "it was a miracle ours was standing and we survived."

Radio Siddhu was among the 61 community radio stations in the 15 districts that were damaged in the earthquake. 30 of which had their buildings collapsed (see map). Most lost their equipment, Radio Siddhu was among the lucky ones. Radio Circuit Hong Kong (see list) had their buildings collapsed (see map). Most lost their equipment, Radio Circuit Hong Kong (see list) had their buildings collapsed (see map). Most lost their equipment, Radio Circuit Hong Kong (see list). Radio Circuit Hong Kong (see list) had their buildings collapsed (see map).

The radio stations have great courage and commitment to their profession by not letting the disaster stop them from their job of informing the public," said Min Shahi, former president of the Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (ACORAB). "Even during normal times, community radio stations play an important role in development, but in times of crisis like this they become a vital communication tool."

Organisations like ACORAB and Antenna Foundation Nepal have rushed to help phone damaged transmitters, studio equipment, computers and battery banks. Radio Siddhu went back on air from a tent in a field after it got a replacement transmitter from Antenna. But that was knocked out by lightning during a storm last weekend. Radio Rasuwa has also resumed to broadcasting after Dhome after getting a generator from Antenna.

"We have requests from many stations for mobile transmitters, telephone hybrids and we are trying to loan them to these stations. We try to help them to be self-sufficient, and in other places we are sending out technicians to repair equipment," Antenna’s Satish Jung Shahi told us. “This is an opportunity to rebuild.”

While the Nepal government can help FM stations in earthquake affected areas by waiving renewal fees and not taxing annual income this year, human rights organisations can step up to support local radio stations in the earthquake affected districts so they can retain staff and keep providing critical information to the affected communities.

A national survey carried out in 2014 showed that 86 per cent of Nepalese have access to mobile phones and 40 per cent listen to radio on their mobiles. With a majority of young men working in the Gulf, most households in Sindhupalchok have mobile phones. Cell phones are the only way to get in touch with relatives abroad, but also to dial-in programs at radio stations, which have now become the mainstay of local radio stations.

Radio Siddhu broadcast in Helmu, Nepal and Tamang languages which were before the earthquake used to focus on information useful for migrant labourers: how to go to farms, looking for overseas jobs, what legitimate recruiting companies look like, how to guard against exploitation, fraud and corruption.

However, in the weeks following the earthquake, FM stations have changed their programming as the situation has worsened. One example, has dedicated morning programs that interview representatives from district’s agriculture, forestry, livestock, water, health or sanitation departments and afternoon call-in programs that allow citizens to pose question to VDC Secretaries or their assistants, political party representatives and civil society organisations.

"While radio producers have learned to ask questions of local government, political parties and development workers, they have yet to learn to report on humanitarian aid distribution processes," last week Radio Siddhu wanted to produce a program about relief distribution. It got a list of organisations involved in providing services in Sindhupalchok from the UN office, picked random VDC’s from the list, and called Secretaries and political party representatives to report what work the organisations in the UN’s list were doing in that VDC. Neither the VDC representatives nor the political party representatives had heard about the organisations that were in the list. The radio station gave up after a few phone calls and the program was never aired.

Local radio stations have been critical in providing information to Nepal for the last two decades. They have helped people make sense of politics, and local development and now to know about post-quake issues. Development projects in Nepal have traditionally used radio as an outreach tool for nutrition, safe motherhood, conflict mitigation, transparency and government accountability.

Radio helped development projects overcome the challenges of terrain, linguistic and ethnic diversity and low literacy. In the aftermath of the earthquake, radio can play an even more important role in rebuilding. Those working in relief, recovery and reconstruction need to reach out to local radio stations and open themselves up to questions from local reporters.

Like VDC Secretaries, political workers, and local government officials, relief and recovery agencies need to learn to communicate with local communities. By reaching out to local radio stations, they are committing to local accountability and helping make relief distribution, post disaster recovery, and reconstruction transparent, accountable and responsive to the needs of the local communities.
In an attempt to return life to post earthquake normalcy, I made an effort to go to the cinema, in a proper theater that had a green sticker. Perhaps my mistake was in picking a film like Avengers: Age of Ultron as a first foray after fairly traumatic events involving one’s entire body and brain being shaken arbitrarily over days and nights. Suffice to say, I was on the edge of my seat for the duration of the film, poised to flee should there be any tremors, not particularly riveted by the fairly standard action movie that was unfolding in front of me.

The problem with this new installment of the Marvel universe is that it tries to do too much. For people like us who have all been through such life-altering experiences where we watched our homes shake violently, convinced that they would disintegrate in front of our eyes, a run of the mill action movie like this one only really induces some eye rolling, and definitely some very uncomfortable moments when entire multi-storied buildings are collapsing to the ground gratuitously destroyed by flying iron men.

Age of Ultron brings back all the beloved characters from the Marvel comics and films, with Robert Downey Jr. becoming less funny and more insufferable with every subsequent turn as Iron Man/Tony Stark, a role that began delightfully in 2008 and now most certainly should be put firmly to rest. Chris Hemsworth returns as Thor, giving us slightly less viewer fatigue than the aforementioned; a tired rumpled Mark Ruffalo reappears as Dr. Bruce Banner/Hulk, as usual, he is a pleasure to watch; Chris Evans as always is slightly flat as Captain America, through no fault of his own other than a poorly written role. Thankfully, the two latest additions to the Avengers team lighten up the boredom with Scarlett Johansson as the feisty Natasha Romanoff/Black Widow, and my personal favourite Jeremy Renner as the cool, calm Clint Barton/Hawkeye.

The plot, as ever, involves saving earth from aliens, in this particular case, Tony Stark’s immense stupidity results in the creation of an artificial intelligence known as Ultron played delightfully cravenly by James Spader who revels in his evil witlessness. As the all powerful Ultron begins his mission to rid the world of all life, in his delusion that humankind are the real problem (and perhaps we are), the Avengers themselves start to fracture, brought together only by necessity and circumstance. In times like these, films such as this one can only seem ridiculously frivolous. While I try not to lose my sense of humour, one can’t help but be just a little peeved that most of the planet can continue to watch this stuff with equanimity when all we want to do is shriek and run with every cinematic explosion.

SECRET NEGOTIATIONS: UCPN(M) Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal has a private chat with Madhesi Janadhikar Forum-Democratic Chair Bijay Kumar Gachhadar after a meeting of the four parties at the PM’s residence in Baluwatar on Tuesday.

ME TO YOU: UML Chair KP Oli hands over a key of a temporary shelter built by the party’s relief and reconstruction committee to an earthquake victim at Balaju in Kathmandu on Tuesday.

GOOD BYE: Prime Minister Sushil Koirala shakes hands with outgoing Finnish ambassador to Nepal Asko Luukkainen during a farewell program at the PM’s residence in Baluwatar on Tuesday.

MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

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Journalist diary
Makar Shrestha, Kantipur, 23 May

Normally I write about other people but today I am writing about my own pain. The earthquake destroyed many houses including mine in Bulunkhari, Dolakha that my father had built. My house suffered some cracks from the 25 April earthquake but the 12 May aftershock destroyed it.

Fortunately, there were no casualties at my house. As a journalist, I have to devote more time to work during such a crisis. Putting my own pain aside, I just got back into reporting on the aftermath of the disaster. On 1 May, I headed to Singati with tents for my family who had spent the last few nights under the open sky.

Deep cracks on the roads. We tried to hire a vehicle to go to Singati but no driver was willing to risk his life, given the landslide.

Finally one driver agreed to take us for double the price. In Singati all the concrete houses were destroyed along with the mud and brick ones. There was a stench of dead bodies everywhere, some people were searching for anything useful they could find from under the rubble.

Putting things in perspective, I realized how much luckier I was.

Though I was there for an assignment I wanted to see my sister Lakshmi and niece Romina, fully aware that the road to their house was destroyed.

There were landslides everywhere on the way and I had to return to Singati Bazaar without helping them.

Back in the old bazaar, a local Lal Bahadur Jirel was fixing an old coprry press damaged by the earthquake. “I don’t have any other use to cook in,” he murmured.

For reporting purposes, I went to the temple where people were living in tents. The dogs had brought in parts of unclaimed dead bodies. People had not received any relief materials. There was not enough water and people were starting to get sick. Everyone I met said, “What should we say about the problems here? You are from here, let the higher-ups what they are doing.”

On our way back to Charikot I saw my brother Tapendra trying to rescue people at the bus park. I was assured that 12 people were buried there. He didn’t have either gloves or a mask on.

My father was extremely worried about the situation of his three children: me and my brother in dangerous settings and my sister in the middle of the landslide.

It wasn’t just me who was suffering, my whole community was. So right now I am using writing and reporting as a way to forget my pain.

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Putting things in perspective, I realized how much luckier I was.

Though I was there for an assignment I wanted to see my sister Lakshmi and niece Romina, fully aware that the road to their house was destroyed.

There were landslides everywhere on the way and I had to return to Singati Bazaar without helping them.

Back in the old bazaar, a local Lal Bahadur Jirel was fixing an old coprry press damaged by the earthquake. “I don’t have any other use to cook in,” he murmured.

For reporting purposes, I went to the temple where people were living in tents. The dogs had brought in parts of unclaimed dead bodies. People had not received any relief materials. There was not enough water and people were starting to get sick. Everyone I met said, “What should we say about the problems here? You are from here, let the higher-ups what they are doing.”

On our way back to Charikot I saw my brother Tapendra trying to rescue people at the bus park. I was assured that 12 people were buried there. He didn’t have either gloves or a mask on.

My father was extremely worried about the situation of his three children: me and my brother in dangerous settings and my sister in the middle of the landslide.

It wasn’t just me who was suffering, my whole community was. So right now I am using writing and reporting as a way to forget my pain.

Dumb, Paani

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Lake View Resort, Pokhara

Cockpit view
Himal Khabarpatrika, 31 May

Yeti Airlines Flight 678 took off from Pokhara at 11.50AM on 25 April for Kathmandu. The 45 passengers and crew were settling down for a routine half-hour flight. About five minutes after takeoff, Captain Lawis Chand contacted the control tower at Pokhara Airport but did not get any response.

After multiple attempts, he finally heard someone shouting, “Earthquake, earthquake” into the radio. Pokhara tower told Chand to fly on to Kathmandu but couldn’t give clear instructions to the pilots about whether they could land or not. The plane was running low on fuel. Finally a Sikkim Air helicopter got air borne to make an inspection of the runway. The pilot said the runway looked all right. Captain Chand decided to land his plane at his own risk. “We knew there was a danger, but there was no other option,” he told us.

By this time, another Yeti Airlines flight from Biratnagar was approaching Kathmandu from the east, and was having similar problems getting instructions from the tower, which was swaying so much that equipment had been thrown off tables and air traffic controllers had abandoned their positions. Capt Sabina Shrestha (pic) assumed it was a radio glitch and continued on to Kathmandu.

“From the cockpit it looked like Bhaktapur had been destroyed,” Capt Shrestha said, and the crew worried about their families in the city below.

“After I saw that there was no Dharahara I knew it was a big one.”

She circled for 45 minutes above the airport, and looked down at people running out on to the apron for safety. “The airport looked very chaotic,” she recalled.

Captain Chand was in radio contact with her Yeti Airlines colleague Capt Chand in the other flight, and landed her planes right before his.
Saving Swayambhu

Among the heritage sites that were damaged in the 25 April earthquake is Swayambhunath, the temple on a hill overlooking the city where Manjushree is supposed to have seen a lotus bloom on the lake that was once Kathmandu Valley. Since then, Swayambhunath has been a shrine for Buddhists and Hindus alike and holds great cultural and religious significance to the people of Kathmandu. However, the M7.8 earthquake badly damaged the stupa, chaityas and some of the stone sculptures of gods and goddesses.

French archaeologist and art historian, David Andolfatto (pic. left), who is a UNESCO consultant assessing the damage to Kathmandu’s cultural heritage says up to 70 per cent of Swayambhunath may have to be rebuilt. Andolfatto is working with Swayambhunath’s head priest, Amrit Man Buddhacharya, to make a painstaking inventory of every tiny artifact that was in the destroyed monuments.

“The priority now is to protect the damaged monuments before the monsoon,” said Andolfatto, who has had to deal with culture, and sometimes even politics. For example, the tantric Shantipur Mandir and the two paintings inside need to be restored, but only two priests are allowed to enter it.

The restoration also has to decide how to seal cracks in the main stupa. Precautions must be taken with the material used as it might leak on the sculptures inside.

Since the beginning of the assessment in Swayambhunath, UNESCO has got help from locals and foreigners. Andolfatto is willing to train more volunteers, but he wants committed people.

Helpers are also needed to set up temporary shelters for the community living around the stupa. Buddhacharya, whose ancestors have been living in Swayambhunath for 1600 years, regrets the concern is only about the stupa. “There are 115 people living here, and 27 houses have collapsed, who is going to rebuild those?” he asks.

The 30 families are now living in tents around the stupa from where they still conduct the daily religious rituals. “These people are intangible heritage that keeps the tangible alive,” says Andolfatto, who estimates it may take seven years to make the tangible accessible.

The Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation said it was crucial to organise fam trips for celebrities, tour operators and travel writers to Nepal. Such initiatives would enable a better view of Nepal’s touristic potentials after 25 April.

T he Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation last week unveiled a list of goodwill ambassadors, which includes Japanese Junko Tabei, the first woman to climb Everest, Peter Athern and Jamling Tenzing, sons of Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay Sherpa and Italian climber Reinhold Messner, who became the first person to scale Everest without supplemental oxygen.

The list also features names of well-known mountaineers Peter Athos (US), Um Hong-gill (South Korea), Idurne Pasaban (Spain), Jean Michel Asselin (France), Wolfgang Nairz (Austria), Ralf Dujmovits (Germany), Nichole Nikki (Switzerland), Katja Storties (Netherlands), and Doc Mc Karr (Britain).

Nepali women mountaineers Mingma Sherpa, Lhakpa Rita Sherpa, Sumita Maskey and Shalinee Banet (pic. right) are also among the newly-nominated goodwill ambassadors. The names were made public at an event organised in Kathmandu to mark international Mt Everest day last week.

The Ministry hopes the ambassadors will play a crucial role in promoting tourism in the international market and help revive the industry that has been hit hard by the recent earthquakes.

Arrivals have gone down as low as 90 per cent and majority of the hotels recorded hundred per cent booking cancellations. Even in areas not affected by the quake there are hardly any tourists left.

However, tourism entrepreneurs are hopeful that tourists will visit Nepal in the next autumn season as most trekking routes and tourism destinations are not affected by the quake.

Many more opening

Several cultural sites in Kathmandu Valley damaged during the earthquake are currently being assessed by the Department of Archaeology. Most of them are closed but a few have been opened to the public.

Boudhanath, Budhanilkantha and Pashupatinath are some of the sites declared safe by the Department of Archaeology.

The Tourism Recovery Committee said more heritage sites in Kathmandu Valley will open in the coming weeks. Bhesa Dahal, director general of Archaeology Department gave his approval for the opening of Kathmandu Durbar Square, Swayambhunath and Patan Durbar Square on 15 June.

Suresh Man Shrestha, Secretary of Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation said it was crucial to organise fam trips for celebrities, tour operators and travel writers to Nepal. Such initiatives would enable a better view of Nepal’s touristic potentials after 25 April.

New ambassadors

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Waiting and watching

Guests may be gods, but they are not very visible lately in the tourist hub of Thamel

KARMA GURUNG

Six weeks after the 25 April Earthquake, a once-vibrant, cosmopolitan tourist district of Thamel today has empty streets, half-heartedly open shops and traders sitting around with their heads in their hands. Guests may be gods, but they have not been very visible lately.

From the look of it, it is vital we see a professional. It is not good for ourselves, and our loved ones, to stay stuck with that feeling of fear and uncertainty.

Please send me more questions to: askanjanananything@kathmandunew.com or @AnjanaRH

Hi all,

We are past the one month mark of the 25 April earthquake, yet we continue to think, worry and recover from the loss and shock. However, the amazing thing about our body is that it has a natural healing process. We have a tendency to move towards getting better. We will start to discover feelings left in our minds and bodies, and struggle with them, even if we did not lose much of anything or anyone.

If two or three months after an incident we are still struggling with moving on, it is not good for ourselves, and our loved ones, to stay stuck with that feeling of fear and uncertainty.

Hi Anjana

The university I attend has been closed since the earthquake and I find myself constantly googling about quakes and hearing so many stories about the next potential one. I look up tips on how to survive one and have also downloaded many apps to notify me about earthquake. I have also heard that you cannot predict an earthquake. When I talk to people about it they say I am too scared and I should not be. But I think it is good and smart to be alert. Of course I am scared and worried, but I am trying to be cautious. Do I need to draw a line somewhere? I am not able to stop thinking about an impending earthquake, reading more about it, and learning ways to stay safe. Is this bad?

AR:

You are among a fairly large population of people who are trying to find every possible way to stay safe. What happened was a life altering experience and many of us cannot associate any form of ‘shaking’ with a positive metaphor for a while. I do think it is necessary for you to draw the line here because otherwise you may not be able to stop before you have caused too much mental chaos for yourself and the ones around you. It is smart to stay alert, but being borderline paranoid that a possible imminent disaster might happen any second is not necessary.

Try to get away from earthquake related news slowly and you can do that by taking care of yourself. Continuing to think and talk about the earthquake will make it harder for you to move on. Reassure yourself that things will get better. Replay good memories in your mind. Volunteer or help others. Be kind to yourself. Try not to put yourself in the midst of the commotion that you are trying to move on from. Focus on the positive. If you are religious or spiritual try to have faith in something bigger believing that with time it will get better.

You survived, you are healthy, and you have access to the internet, so you are among the lucky ones. Be grateful because many people have it far worse. I am not saying to neglect your fears and change how we feel: it will take time, practice, and multiple reminders. Take care of yourself, and good luck.

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

**Ar**

Keep moving forward

ASK ANJANA ANYTHING

Anjana Rajbhandary

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Anjana is a certified mental health rehabilitation technician and has four years of experience in adult mental health in Maine, USA.
Kumar Rai and Jamuna Neupane had met in Kathmandu three years ago. He worked in a hardware store in Boudha and she was a student in Dharan visiting her sister. The two fell in love and developed a long-distance relationship.

On 25 April, Jamuna and Kumar were in Kathmandu when the earthquake struck and escaped unhurt. Jamuna and her sister immediately went back to Dharan for safety, and Kumar went to see if his family in Sipaghat in Sindhupalchok were all right – the Rai family house is the only one standing on the street.

While in Dharan, Jamuna’s Brahmin parents found out that she was in a relationship with a person from another ethnic group. They locked her up in the house and started preparations to get her married off to someone from her own caste.

Jamuna had saved her SIM card and called Kumar, who rushed to Dharan on a rescue mission and managed to sneak her out of her house and back to Kathmandu and Sipaghat. Fearing that the Neupanes would come to Sindhupalchok to get their daughter and marry her off, the two 21-year-olds decided to get married – earthquake or no earthquake.

Preparations for the wedding were underway when the 12 May aftershock hit Sinduphalchok with the force of another full-scale earthquake. It added a sense of urgency to their marriage plans.

“We were afraid, there were earthquakes all day, but I knew I was safe as long as I was with him,” Jamuna told us, “if we died, at least we would die together.” Kumar said he was forced to bring forward the wedding date despite the earthquakes because he was afraid that Jamuna would get married to someone else. He said: “I can make her happy, and if they want to see their daughter happy why should they be worried?”

Kumar said the wedding was an act of love, and it was symbolic to have it amidst the ruins of the village. “It gave a sign of hope while the country and community was suffering, that it is necessary to rise up and look to the future,” he said.

Jamuna, meanwhile is looking to completing her studies so that she can be with Kumar and live happily ever after.

“Love can overcome prejudice and crisis.”