



JANA AŠENBRENNEROVÁ

Building a new future

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.

POLITICAL TECTONICS

BY THE WAY

BY ANURAG ACHARYA PAGE 3

25 June Donor Summit

Interview with Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat

PAGE 4



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POST-MORTEM OF A DISASTER

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 leading to tragic 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 energy beneath us, and that this earthquake should spur us 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 backlog 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 about just how unprepared we were to a disaster that everyone knew was coming. During the 1996-2006 conflict, Nepalis had to deal with the day-to-day disaster of war, and earthquakes were not a priority. Since 2006, the constitution, peace process and power games have preoccupied politicians and the media, leaving them too distracted to plan for a future quake.

Even so, the awareness campaign was starting to have an effect. Funds were being pledged, exercises held, contingency plans drawn up, communities had started stockpiling emergency equipment and pre-positioning supplies. We were preparing to be prepared when the earthquake struck on 25 April.

There were many factors that kept the death toll far lower than expected. First of all, at M7.8 this wasn't a 'Big One' and it didn't strike at night when most people would have been home. The intensity and duration of shaking was just below the threshold for ferro-cement failure, so brick and clay mortar buildings went down and only badly-built



KUNDA DIXIT

concrete structures collapsed. Also, the dry season and over-extraction of groundwater had lowered Kathmandu's water table which meant that the Valley's soft soil did not suffer liquefaction.

Striking just before noon on a Saturday saved at least 75,000 lives – of children who would have been in the 5,500 schools that were completely destroyed. Many of their parents were in the fields, digging potatoes, harvesting wheat or weeding the cornfields. A quarter of the men in the 15 districts have migrated out, which also lowered the death toll.

Kathmandu itself was spared the worst-case scenario for a projected M8.5. Telecommunications could have gone down, but didn't. The airport should have been knocked out, but reopened in a few hours. Highways linking Kathmandu to the plains were not blocked, bridges did not go down. Electricity was restored to most of the capital in a few days. Retrofitted schools in the Valley and the outskirts

all survived. Hospital buildings did not collapse, and triage training drills had prepared medical staff, and the system worked. Journalists who had attended disaster management workshops reported responsibly. The state media performed exceptionally well in keeping the flow of accurate information, and community FM stations went back on air almost immediately after the first shock, transmitting from improvised outdoor studios (*see page 10-11*).

Experts we spoke to while researching this piece, however, said there are many things that could have been done better during the 'Golden Hour' when more lives could have been saved. The first few days saw slow government response, confusion and lack of coordination. The National Emergency Operation Centre should have been activated immediately with participation of top political leaders, security agencies, scientists as well as the United Nations Resident Coordinator. Customs was a disaster, operating with obdurate business-as-usual red tape when relief material needed urgent delivery.

This group could have taken snap decisions on assessment, deployment of search and rescue, relief and coordinating incoming assistance. As it turned out, the politicians vanished, and the Nepal Army stepped in to play the coordinating role. The other lesson is to immediately expand and train the Armed Police and Nepal Army's Collapse Structure Search and Rescue teams and equip them properly, 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 rupture fizzled out south of the Valley. There is still a potential for another quake in Central Nepal, and then there is the ominous 'seismic gap' in western Nepal that hasn't seen a mega-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 shaking.

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

YOUR SAY

www.nepalitimes.com

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 and took up personal activities all around the country. Local children in my home village had a cake sale, others nearby collected coins. These are the people who worked tirelessly, so give them some credit.

Socrates

■ What can be done to extend the duty free status for tents and CGI sheets that are so desperately needed before monsoon? Truck loads of relief materials are being held up at the Indian border because the organisations do not have the funds to pay the high duty on CGI sheets. Can't the government extend the duty free status until after everyone has temporary shelter?

S Kelly

POLITICAL AFTERSHOCKS

If Baburam Bhattarai is to head the agency, he will have to disavow any affiliations with any political party, no post retirement political post and recant, retract all his past political statements ('Political aftershocks', Damakant Jayshi, #760).

Nam

■ We don't have a government, all we have is a network of corrupted political crooks.

Manosh Lal Karmacharya

MOVEMENT TRACKER

Tracking cellphone data should be the last resort to get such data ('Where are we?', Ayesha Shakya, #760). Moreover Ncell has a history of not following guidelines.

Souj Dhungel

■ Reply from Erik Metters: All data used in this project is de-identified according to mobile industry (GSMA) guidelines that were developed during the Ebola outbreak specifically to mitigate security and privacy issues, what we are doing is essentially similar to traffic statistics but we are counting moving SIMs instead of moving cars.

REBUILDING

The claims of earthquake resistance capability of various new materials for construction floating in the market need

to be tested by an authorised agency ('Building blocks of rebuilding', Shreesha Nankhwa, #760). Proper as they may be to meet the current demand for temporary shelter, unless authenticated by acceptable and recognised tests based on performance criteria, their earthquake resistance capabilities cannot be guaranteed.

Ananta Baidya

■ Attractive alternatives to bricks, but monitoring needed to ensure that these technologies maintain quality once introduced to public from a few model pieces.

Sabitra Gurung

SINDHUPALCHOK

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 most vulnerable (pregnant women, babies and children) from epidemics. The Sindupalchok health authorities and Dr Sagar Rajbhandari are doing a commendable job, and they need all the help they can get.

Jens

TOURISM DOWN

This is so sad ('Where have all the tourists gone', Tsering Dolker Gurung, #760). I do hope that everything returns

to normal. I understand for many it will be just pure pain. Be strong, work together, time to put aside the bad and make things work out for the good of your country.

Rick D Starks

■ A foolish decision by the Western Regional Hotel Association to slash rates - totally contrary to PATA Guidance; a decision taken in unseemly haste and which sends out all the wrong messages. Let's be clear: Pokhara 23 April and Pokhara 29 May are the same - no damage no disruptions so why lower rates as though the product had deteriorated? Add value, add services, add special touches and increase value to visitors' stay, that is the right way ahead for Pokhara and for Nepal.

Marcus Cotton

■ Pokhara has many other serious problems that need attention. Dust and pollution have become serious hazards along with unbridled development of hotels. The once tranquil lakeside path is now crowded and chaotic with shack restaurants and groups of Chinese tourists dominating.

The road going up to Sarangkot or around the lake hasn't improved much. Paragliding companies keep multiplying, bringing in more vans which tear up the road even more.

Alek

Times

THIS WEEK

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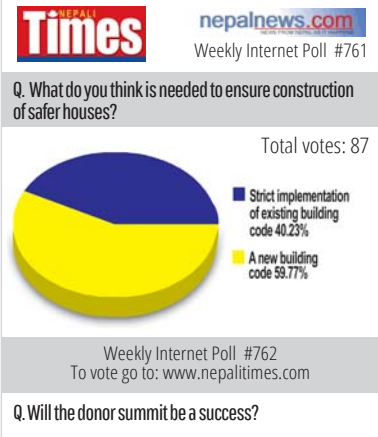


Most shared on Facebook
Where have all the tourists gone?
By Tsering Dolker Gurung (65 shares)

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Where have all the tourists gone?
By Tsering Dolker Gurung (186 retweets, 94 favourites)

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Quake from space by Ayesha Shakya
(4,052 views)

Most commented
Where are we? by Ayesha Shakya
(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.



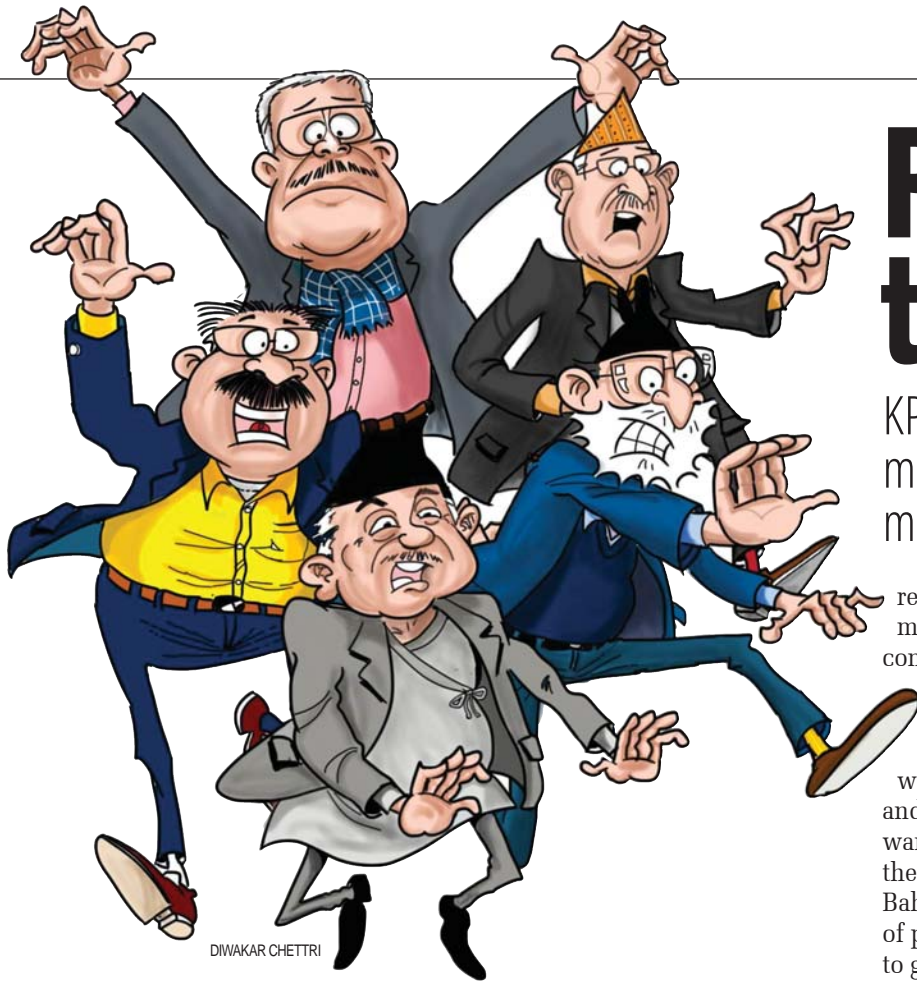
BY THE WAY
Anurag Acharya

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



DIVAKAR CHETTRI

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 after 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 fierce competition for powerful ministerial berths.

The NC, UML and the opposition Maoist-Madhesis 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

Political tectonics

KP Oli's impatience to be a post-quake prime minister may force through a constitution but may open a can of worms

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 Koirala 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-Madhesis alliance will caution the leadership against

joining the government at the moment, but pragmatism may prevail. Or, call it opportunism.

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.

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. @Anurag_Acharya

LET'S REBUILD



“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.



Go Further

25 June Donor Summit

OM ASTHA RAI

Six weeks after the earthquake, the ground has gradually stopped shaking but political aftershocks in the capital have spread uncertainty about the lifespan of the government at a time when it is preparing for a meeting of donors later this month.

The meeting was first mooted by the Japan government, but Nepal wanted it in June itself so it could plan its 2015-16 budget with funds earmarked for reconstruction. Then, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi sent his close adviser PK Mishra, who was also Chief Executive Office of the Reconstruction Authority of Gujarat, to Kathmandu two weeks ago to propose that the meeting be held in New Delhi, which Prime Minister Sushil Koirala declined.

In the run-up to the Kathmandu meeting, which is to be co-hosted by Japan, the National Planning Commission (NPC) on Wednesday

recommended that an empowered Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Committee led by the Prime Minister be formed to rebuild Nepal over the next five years.

The NPC is also readying its Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) report by 15 June, which will form the basis of the government’s request for international assistance at the conference.

However, Kathmandu-based diplomats told us that time was too short for their government to come up with pledges at the 25 June conference, and that they expect it to be a “planning meeting” for a “pledging conference” at a later date.

The UN Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) issued a fresh appeal this week for what it estimated were 2.8 million Nepalis in need of humanitarian assistance. The world’s aid response so far has been disappointing, and the UN’s Nepal Humanitarian Coordinator Jamie McGoldrick said: “I urge the international community to show its solidarity and support

this effort.”

In its revised flash appeal OCHA sought \$422 million for food, temporary shelter, medical care and drinking water in 14 districts for the first five months. Only \$119.6 million has come in.

“Countries never get as much money as they require, but it is a bit discouraging that the UN has not even received 30 per cent of the required funds,” NPC head Govind Raj Pokhrel told us.

One of the reasons for donor wariness is concern about transparency and effective relief delivery. The new agency proposed by the NPC and the needs assessment plan is expected to allay those fears and ask donors to pledge money for 23 areas like infrastructure, health, education and heritage.

Estimates vary about the level of aid needed. Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat says at least \$5 billion is needed over five years, but others in government say it could be as high as \$8 billion. Experts, however, caution that the amount is not as important as how directly it reaches

beneficiaries and how much of foreign aid is spent on overheads and consultants.

In an interview with *Nepali Times* this week (*see below*) Mahat was upbeat about the donor summit, and hoped it will reassure donors about effective delivery. But members of the international community we spoke to say that while the government’s response is now gathering pace, they are not yet fully convinced about equity, accountability and speed of relief delivery. They have pressed for local elections to ensure that aid money is not misused.

The NPC’s Pokharel says the proposed rehabilitation agency could assuage donors to a large extent, adding: “It must be a powerful mechanism led by experts and free of politicians. Civil society can make it more transparent and accountable.”

Mahat agrees with the need for an agency led by the prime minister, but says local body elections are not immediately needed for accountability. “Even without local bodies, we are

far ahead of many countries in Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA),” he told us.

Emergency relief supplies poured in Nepal immediately after the earthquake, but as Nepal falls from international headlines and with other humanitarian hotspots around the world competing for aid, there is a risk that Nepalis will be left to fend for themselves to face the dangers of the approaching monsoon.

Ratindra Khatri, a retired Nepal Army colonel who served in the post-earthquake Haiti, says Nepal still has tremendous international goodwill, and donors are more than willing to help. “It all depends how we approach the international community,” he said, “if we have the right plan and the correct strategy the money, no matter how large, will come.”

The much-awaited needs assessment report, therefore, will be the key in how much money is pledged by the international community, where and how it is spent to rebuild Nepal. 🇳🇵

“We need help to rebuild Nepal”

The government is hosting an international fund-raising conference for longterm 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 Japan government is willing to co-host the conference, which was a positive sign. 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 government processes like land acquisition and EIA, I think we were able to reassure them about fast and effective reconstruction and rehabilitation.

What will be the main focus of the donor conference?

The conference’s foremost objective is to seek support to rebuild Nepal. Besides, we will also prioritise our projects like reconstructing individual houses, schools, hospitals, government buildings and infrastructure.

Is holding local elections an option to assure donors about accountability?

Of course, we need local body elections to expedite local-level projects. But I don’t think we can ensure accountability only by holding local elections. Our rules and regulations to ensure accountability are already strong. Nepal is ahead of many countries in Public

Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA) rankings. I don’t think transparency and accountability should deter donors.

Will there be a reconstruction agency like the one Baburam Bhattarai has proposed? How will you ensure it is apolitical and genuinely one-window?

I don’t know what kind of agency Baburam Bhattarai wants. I think we need a streamlined one-window body with full-time CEO having administrative experience to coordinate post-earthquake reconstruction. It should not be an independent authority but part of the government and chaired by Prime Minister.

What preparations before the conference?

We are now preparing a Post-Disaster Need Assessment (PDNA) report, which should be ready in less than two weeks. 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 interests and advantages, they can help with reconstruction of individual houses, government buildings, health facilities, schools or monuments.

What are you doing to ensure that aid is not tied as it was in Haiti?

It will depend on how we design our projects, and it will be a government-led process. They might also have their own areas of interest like health, education or 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?

We will have to wait for the needs assessment report, but I think we need at least \$5 billion for the first phase of five-six years. We can bear up to 20 per cent of this budget ourselves.

Do we have a concrete strategy in place to create jobs during reconstruction to encourage Nepalis working abroad to return?

We can talk about it only when we are done with our needs assessment. But, yes, we are reeling under a huge labour shortage. To revive our economy, we need to begin reconstruction work at the earliest. This will create jobs, and a demand for raw materials, purchasing power will go up and it will have a multiplier effect.

How big is the problem of reconstruction of individual houses?

That is the biggest problem. We are providing Rs 15,000 immediately for temporary shelters. In the longer-term we want to help people build earthquake-resistant houses and will help them with model designs which they can choose from. Reconstruction will be closely monitored and subsidies disbursed only when procedures are followed.



OM ASTHA RAI

Is money an issue?

Money is of course a problem, particularly for rebuilding individual houses. Donors can help rebuild infrastructure, government buildings or monuments but it would be difficult to ask them to provide cash grants for reconstruction of individual houses. We will have to take care of that.

What can we do to revive tourism, are you thinking of waiving visas to encourage tourists to visit Nepal?

Visas are not a problem. Tourists can get visas on arrival. Of course, they are facing delays at immigration, and that is unlikely to improve with the existing management. What’s wrong in hiring a 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 UCPN (M) affect reconstruction works?

It is hard to tell, but what I can say is: the focus will be divided when there will be a government representing more parties and more interest groups.

Travel Advisory after Earthquake

1. Travelling after disaster may not be comfortable, be prepared mentally and physically to cope with difficulties.

2. Take travel kit with you that should contain water, dry/high energy food, first aid, torch light, regular used medicine, hygiene, travel documents (if applicable) etc.

3. Take alternate means of communication as available (sat phone, radio set etc.).

4. Assess the route (based on available information/contacts) and make sure, if the route to destination is safe.

5. Arrange appropriate means of transportation, the route may not be accessible for heavy vehicles due to landslides and rock falls.

6. While travelling to damage areas, be prepared with safety equipment such as helmet, working gloves, full sleeve cloths, raincoat, hard toe shoes, whistle etc.

7. Make sure your identity card is in both languages Nepali and English; keep it always with you.

8. Establish contact in the place of origin and destination; if possible identify at least one contact point for local arrangement.




9. Provide regular updates on locations and unusual situations to contact points and family while travelling.

10. Keep an emergency diary containing ICE and other emergency numbers, and a pen with you.

11. While travelling, be careful with unstable slopes and possibility of falling rocks and trees.

12. If you are driving, be careful while crossing bridges; and don't stop on the top and under the bridges, trees and tall buildings.

13. While driving, if it is shaking, don't stop abruptly, rather take your side and avoid falling structures/objects, and be inside the vehicle until shaking stops.



For more information on Earthquake Safety
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Ward No. 4, Bhainsepati Residential Area, Lalitpur, Tel: (977-1) 5591000, 5592522, 5593000, Fax: (977-1) 5592692, 5592693
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An initiative under NSET implemented program "Promoting Public Private Partnership for Earthquake Risk Management (3PERM)" supported by USAID/OFDA.



GOPEN RAI

Now that the date and venue for the donor conference for earthquake rebuilding has 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 and our achievement in maternal and child health. Donors were involved in both, through catalytic inputs that did not cost a whole lot of money.

In the 1980s, 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 impress on the team that user management of forests should be a conditionality for the loan.

That did the trick. Thereafter, 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

Follow the people

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 Nepalis 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


'representativeness' of our 'democracy' for the last quarter of a century, these 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 consistently and increasingly been the government of the corrupt, for the corrupt and by the corrupt. And politicians themselves seem to have no problem accepting this. I have often been asked to address various political gatherings and I tell my audiences that Nepali society continues to remain feudalistic in nature and this manifests itself through ascriptive 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, abetted 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. 🇳🇵

**BIZ BRIEFS**

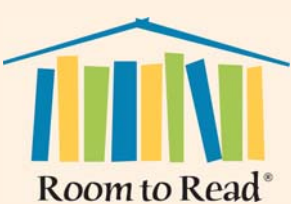


Rebuilding schools

Ambe Cement has established a relief fund of Rs 2.1 million for rebuilding schools in the earthquake affected districts. The company will contribute five rupees from each unit of cement sold to the fund.



School supplies

Room to Read is sending school kits to over 4,800 schools in the 14 affected districts. Each kit contains 100 books published by Room to Read. Schools can contact their local education offices to receive the packages.




International investment


International Finance Corporation, a member of the World Bank Group, will invest \$3 million in Nepal Hospitality and Hotel to develop a Greenfield 3-star hotel in Kathmandu. The hotel will be operated by international chain Marriot under its Fairfield brand. IFC will also mobilise an additional \$3 million from FMO, the Netherlands-based development bank.



Furniture land

Kunal Living Decor has announced a discount of up to 40 per cent on select furnishings and furniture. The sale is expected to minimise the cost of new furniture for individuals who lost their homes in the earthquake. Ten per cent of the total sales will be contributed towards relief programs.





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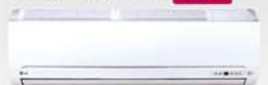
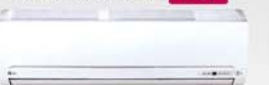
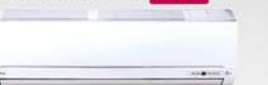




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Newfound empathy

Nepali journalists reported on the disaster with compassion, others not so much

One of the most moving pieces of reportage to come out of the 25 April earthquake has been from Al Jazeera's Nepal correspondent Subina 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."



BETWEEN THE LINES

Tsering Dolker Gurung

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 and lose composure on the 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 all strangers.

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 about the country's geography, culture and customs, and who couldn't place Nepal on a map before the quake, we understood the nuances and had more insight.



BIKRAM RAJ

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-whites and shaving your head?" We had our reservations about taking pictures of mass funerals at Pashupatinath that had become mandatory for many international photojournalists. Even James Natchway 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 hinders 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 reportage.

For many of us, this was also the biggest story of our lives. We all knew that a big earthquake was going to strike any day, but like the government, were ill prepared on how to report when it happened. Few media houses conducted in-house training on disaster reporting, or provided the necessary resources to reporters during the state of emergency.

Many colleagues went to far-flung areas on their personal initiative with no support from editors. They became the ones to produce first-hand account of what was really going on.

Journalist Amantha Perrera who has reported on the war in Sri Lanka in an interview with DART Centre for Journalism and Trauma said: "Self care is very important. We don't realise it but covering death and mayhem day in day out can have a really deep impact on our work and on ourselves."

One of the positive impacts to come out of this disaster has been a newly-found empathy for the people that are our stories, but it has also brought to light the lack of training and resources for journalists covering disasters in Nepal. 🇳🇵

@Chenreeyang

Following the script

Disaster reporting by the international media followed a formulaic style that distorted reality

KUNDA DIXIT

It is perhaps only when they become a part of the story they are reporting that journalists realise just what a narrow segment of reality they depict in the coverage of a crisis. This is especially true when foreign correspondents report 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, my family got frantic calls from friends and relatives around the world. They seemed surprised that we were still alive, that our house was intact, we had food and water, or that they could even make that phone call.

Like everyone else, they had seen images of Kathmandu Valley's historic monuments reduced to rubble, piles of bricks where people's homes used to be, and photographs taken from rescue helicopters of destroyed villages clinging precariously to steep mountainsides. These apocalyptic scenes had convinced them that there was nothing left.

Yet 80 per cent of the houses in Kathmandu Valley were intact. Even in the historic heart of the city, the main temples and palaces were still there. The only thing different in most neighbourhoods after the earthquake was that there weren't the usual traffic jams.

In fact, the first foreign correspondents to parachute in the next morning were surprised on the drive into the city that they didn't spot a single ruined building. Had they flown into the wrong hotspot by mistake?

Many of us in the media are accused of distortion by being selective in what we choose to report. Some foreign correspondents are careful not to fall into that trap - trying instead to break away from stereotypical coverage and catch a deeper understanding of what is really happening beneath the surface, or away from the spotlight.

There were many exemplary reportages that humanised the story with tales of grief, fortitude and compassion. Still, there is a formula for news and it's hard to file a story that doesn't fit it.

Which is why from Haiti to Haiyan, from Nargis to Nepal, it is, quite literally, the same old story. The international media arrives in herds and hunts in packs. Everything has to conform to a preordained script: you parachute in and immediately find good visuals of 'utter devastation'; recruit an English-speaking local who doesn't need subtitling; trail the rescue teams with sniffer dogs you flew in with as they pull someone out alive after 12 hours (the rescuers need their logos on tv as much as you need them in the picture).

Then it's back to the hotel bar to swap stories of derring-do, before calling the desk to plan tomorrow's story of slow government response, and the day after tomorrow's account of yet another survivor pulled out alive. After that, get a ride in a rescue helicopter for the out-of-town visual of utter devastation in a remote mountain village.

To my knowledge, no foreign correspondent went around shooting streets in which all the buildings were still standing. They didn't have time to look at farmers harvesting potatoes by the roadside as they rushed to pan across more historic ruins. Few ever reported that only 14 of Nepal's 75 districts were affected. Kathmandu-based diplomats, when they flew over the epicentre in Gorkha district last month, were surprised to see much less damage than they had expected.

No one found it extraordinary or newsworthy that the phones were working, that they could tweet even from the hinterland, the airport was functioning, or that Kathmandu got electricity back in three days. Such bits of information didn't fit the script.

Tv crews pitched their tents (all with their own Honda generators) next to each other in Kathmandu's Darbar Square to frame the ruins of the old Malla palace as the backdrop to invited talking heads. No wonder tv news program all look alike, and are called 'shows'.

One interviewee was asked if he could dim the lights for a Skype interview to make it look like things were really dark in post-earthquake Kathmandu. A scheduled live stand-up with a local journalist by CNN's Anderson Cooper was cancelled at 4am local time because, well, they were rioting in Baltimore.

Needless to say, this kind of disaster reporting comes with predictable problems. Firstly, it distorts the scale of the destruction, either exaggerating the damage or not highlighting the areas where things are much worse. It focuses on the city, where people have better access to relief and information, and takes the story on a tangent away from the real needs on the ground.

Because competing tv channels are in the same helicopter, there is a temptation to over-dramatise, embellish and overstate. And countries like Nepal better have their disasters on a slow news day in North America - otherwise they might not make the bulletins.

But in Kathmandu this month it was the arrival of Indian TV journalists that exposed the worst shortcomings of the international media. It was as if the reporters were selected for their archetypal crudeness and rudeness, and ability to be insensitive to survivors. Nepali villagers who had just lost relatives were treated like hard-of-hearing hillbillies who should have been thankful to be on camera.

Had Indian reporters known they had to prove to Nepalis they were not the bullying 'big brother' (and that they were already being criticised for taking free rides on helicopters meant for rescue and relief) they would probably have been more careful.

Not surprisingly #GoHomeIndianMedia, started trending on Twitter and the transgressions of a few tactless journalists tainted the rest of the Indian media. Surprisingly, the most biting criticism came from India's own public sphere, with many criticising the country's TV coverage of the Kashmir floods last year as equally crass and overbearing.

Soon it was time to leave and travel to another disaster zone. Many international reporters had left by the time the aftershock hit on 12 May, destroying homes already weakened by the main quake. Three districts that had escaped relatively unscathed the first time were badly hit. But the foreign correspondents who'd remained in Nepal had by then got to know the terrain and their coverage was more comprehensive.

However, even though reports were coming in of horrific damage in Dolakha district, the disaster was becoming 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 distorts reality by 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 to comprehend the screen is just not wide enough to show the immensity of an avalanche that obliterates a village of 500 inhabitants. Words are not enough, visuals are inadequate to show what happened to the village of Langtang on 25 April, or to the settlement of Singati during the 12 May aftershock.

The challenge now is to keep the spotlight 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, shelter and livelihoods provided for at least three million people in the danger zone. Relief supplies still haven't reached the remote valleys. There are 25,000 schools damaged or destroyed, 1.7 million children are affected. Health posts and hospitals are barely coping with the wounded. The task of reconstruction is beyond comprehension: 600,000 homes were destroyed.

Another disaster looms, as the monsoons trigger landslides and a silent emergency of epidemics. But the media pack has left, and with it the headlines that keep the crisis alive. Already, donations for relief and rehabilitation have started tapering off. 🇳🇵

A version of this piece was originally published on the BBC's College of Journalism blog.



It's official: the monsoon is delayed. It hasn't hit the Kerala coast as we go to press on Thursday, which is one week behind schedule. Things may pick 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 thunderstorms have been dissipated by the high temperatures. Kathmandu will be hot, hot, hot for a while longer.

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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 Kadaghari 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 designing 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 *Nepali 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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NEPAL 425



When Britons Richard Jones and James Watson decided to go to Nepal on a trek earlier this year they knew it would be an adventure, little did they know that the experience would change the trajectory of their lives. The tourists stayed on in Nepal to provide emergency relief, and now want to combine their love for photography into a book of images of Nepal to raise money for long-term rehabilitation.

Jones had been to Nepal 16 years ago for a trek with his high school, a trip that infected him with the travel bug. He had always wanted to come back to Nepal, drawn by the people and the mountains.

Watson is a photographer and was on his way to Everest Base Camp when the Earthquake hit. Jones was in the Annapurnas. When they got back to Kathmandu with South African friend Gareth Pickering, they decided not to go

home and stay on to help with earthquake relief.

First they helped host families in Suredhara to clear the rubble of their destroyed homes, they would meet Nepalis by chance on the streets of Thamel who would tell them about devastated villages up in the mountains, and would pack supplies in a truck and head off the next morning.

“None of us wanted to leave,” Watson said, “we felt it was our responsibility to stay and help a country and people that had given so much to us.”

The three were a rare breed, Thamel was teeming with tourists waiting for the limited tickets available on flights out in the weeks after 25 April. By now, they have cancelled their tickets three times, and extended their visas twice. “It hasn’t been cheap,” grins Watson.

They may be just three friends who have got together to



help Nepal in its hour of need, but through social networking sites they have managed to raise funds from friends, and friends of friends, all over the world. One Facebook appeal got them \$25,000 which they are ploughing into the neediest, remotest villages.

The need of every village is

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 50 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 brainstorming with his friends about what they can do for Nepal in the long-term.

Since the three have bonded 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.

Said 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*

Find details on how to submit photographs for inclusion in the book here.

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When the mountain

HEATHER GELUK

Lhakpa Wongchu Sherpa and I set out from Shishapangma Advanced Base Camp on 25 April in heavy snow, limited visibility, and a gentle breeze that left the long string of prayer flags blowing gently in the wind. Despite the weather, we felt warm and safe in the mountains as we began to make our way up to Depot Camp at 5800m.

It was a long, slow plod over a maze of rock, mud and snow with limited opportunity to appreciate the mighty mountain vistas hidden in the mist. We’d only been teased with fleeting views of this 8025m summit, the 14th highest in the world.

I had been planning this ‘Himalayan Double Header’ expedition for six months: climb Shishapangma from early April to mid-May and then travel overland to climb the 6th highest mountain in the world, Cho Oyu for a mid-late May summit. If successful I would be the first woman in 23 years to have done so and the 2nd woman ever.

When we reached the Depot Camp, I sat reflecting on my passion for mountaineering. Mountains provide context, they are humbling and make you realise there are forces in nature that will never be harnessed, that won’t bend to our schedules. Rather, we bend to theirs. Coming from a consulting job that demands structure and planning, I find this lack of ‘control’ in mountaineering an opportunity for reckless mental and physical creativity liberating.

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.



My initial instinct was that this was an avalanche, but where was it coming from? We were literally surrounded by mountains on all sides and had zero visibility. The ground then began to shift back and forth in a slow rhythmic movement. Earthquake.

Lhakpa shouted over the roaring sound of falling rock and ice. Through the mist we tried desperately to establish the direction from which the avalanche would come. We huddled next to a rock, our eyes darting in all directions, hugging each other, terrified, praying that the rumbling and shaking would stop.

In what felt like an eternity, the seismic shifts beneath our feet finally subsided. As we fearfully made our way back to Advanced Base Camp, we noticed the impact of the quake and the avalanches of snow and rock it had released. There were fresh cracks in the ground, loose boulders dislodged, cracked ice in the lakes. Almost eerily, the snow stopped and the cloud lifted, and rather than a scene of destruction and devastation, the mountain vista stretched out before us seemed almost beautiful, natural and strangely rebalanced.



PAYING BACK: Heather Geluk below Shishapangma, the world’s 12th highest peak in Tibet before the earthquake (*above*) and with children in Thame (*left*).

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 a scale unprecedented to my senses and any previous frames of reference.

My first day back in Kathmandu was an emotional

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.

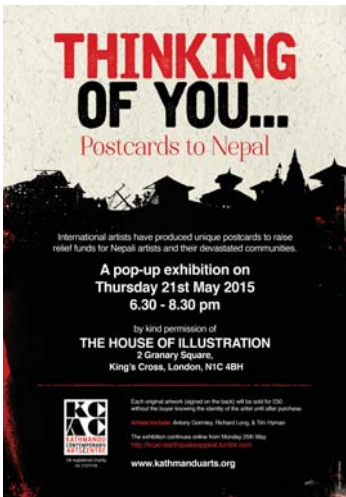
"Artists who want to help can donate a piece of artwork and buyers can end up with a wonderful work of art," said Celia Washington of KCAC who brought together the artists who donated their work. The postcards were sold for £50 each, and all the money raised will go to support earthquake relief operations 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



KONRAD GABRIEL

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.



ATISH CHITRAKAR

The exhibition lasted for two hours at The House of Illustration last month and 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. photo.circle's NepalPhotoProject has recently been added to the list of supported projects.

So far, *Thinking of You* has raised £4,000 and aims to support other grassroots projects in the 14 districts affected by the quake. 🇳🇵



PARISH SHAKYA

Set up after the earthquake by photographer Sumit Dayal with photo.circle, NepalPhotoProject is a participatory platform where contributors can share their photos on social media by using the hashtag #nepalphotoproject.

"The intention was to create a space for stories that go beyond news," says Nayantra Gurung Kakshapati from photo.circle.

NepalPhotoProject has had over 70 contributors post around 500 photos. It is followed by 61,000 people on Instagram and 7,000 on Facebook.

KCAC's *Thinking of You* will financially support one photographer, chosen by photo.

circle, who will document the long-term rebuilding process in Nepal over the span of a year. "NepalPhotoProject will hopefully contribute towards providing visibility of Nepal's story on social media, as most of the international press have left," says Gurung Kakshapati.

'Rebuilding Bungamati', led by Sujan Chitrakar from Kathmandu University's Centre for Art and Design, is helping facilitate the development process of the village by empowering women, helping schools and supporting local authorities by making a five-year plan for Bungamati (see picture).

"Bungamati has a rich

cultural importance and as our department is related to art, we thought it was an ideal town to adopt," Chitrakar says. About 40 art students have provided roofing for over 500 people, and are working with school children.

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.

moved



SHERPA ADVENTURE GEAR

roller coaster 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 so incredibly generous to me since my first visit 15 years ago. I knew I had skills that would be helpful in mobilising the aid required to provide relief and support the rebuilding of the country. I decided to stay and help my friend Tashi Sherpa of Sherpa Adventure Gear and his team raise funds for earthquake relief through the Paldorje Education Foundation and provide assistance with the distribution of aid to those most in need.

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 earthquake and in a city for the second was equally terrifying. This time the danger wasn't avalanches coming down, it was the buildings.

On the ground relief work has opened my eyes to the scale of the disaster: many villages still look like a war zone. Buildings tilt 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 since travelled and distributed relief to areas that I didn't even know existed, unpronounceable places on a map are now personified by images of 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 survivors of the Langtang tragedy now living at the Yellow Gumpa in Kathmandu. 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. [peopleyoumeetalongtheway.blogspot.com](#)



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Radio active after the



MADHU ACHARYA

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.

Reporter Deepak Khatri (*below*) interviews earthquake survivors in Chautara last week for his program.

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.

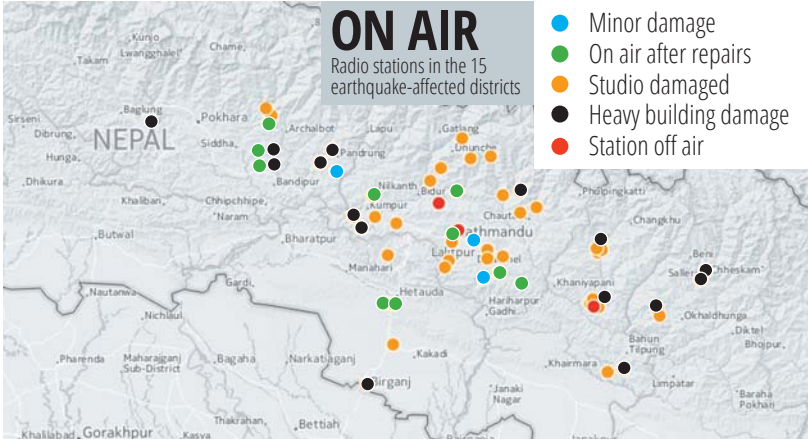
Within hours of the first quake, Radio Sindhu staff rushed into the station, grabbed a few broadcast essentials from inside the damaged building, and set up camp in a clearing overlooking the Tundikhel. A thin bamboo pole now serves as the station's antenna.

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



quake



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 Sindhu 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, their studios were destroyed, radio staff lost family members and home, and yet some were on air later on Saturday broadcasting from the open air with salvaged equipment.

“The radio stations showed 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 Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (ACORAB) Nepal and now with World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC). “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 replace damaged transmitters, studio equipment, computers and battery banks. Radio Sindhu 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 broadcasting from Dhunche after getting a generator from Antenna.

“We have requests from many stations for mobile transmitters, telephone hybrids and we are trying to loan this to them, 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.”

Antenna, ACORAB and AMARC are doing an assessment of the damage to community stations so that the most-needy stations get the equipment they


require most urgently. Radio Sindhu and Radio Melamchi of Sindhupalchok, Radio Gorkha, Radio Rasuwa and Radio Langtang have been shortlisted for immediate help also because the districts they broadcast in have been badly affected.

The aftershocks have prevented the radio stations from making more permanent plans to relocate their transmitters. Many have switched their content to phone-in queries, studio discussions with survivors, expert advice on health, sanitation and relief needs of the people. Journalists, who are themselves traumatised, have also had a difficult time continuing with their regular work.

“When we went to visit the communities few days after the quake, they told us that if it weren’t for radio they wouldn’t even have anyone to share their grief with,” Kishor Jung Thapa of Radio Gorkha told us in a phone interview. After the initial jolt, Radio Gorkha set up its station out in the open and started broadcasting as much information as it could gather immediately.

Community radio in Nepal started with Radio Sagarmatha in 1996 and since then has been playing a vital role strengthening grassroots democracy and development. Today, there are nearly 300 stations across Nepal and their independent content and focus on health, education and accountability have filled the vacuum left by the absence of elected VDCs and DDCs.

In the longterm, Min Shahi of AMARC says Nepal’s community stations need help to address existing management issues, and also training in being prepared for future disasters so they can respond to the emergency needs of their districts. 🇳🇵

nepalitimes.com
Interactive map

Transmit hope

Kathmandu’s radio stations were on air when the shaking started at 11:56AM on 25 April. Some staff ran for their lives, and transmission was halted. Others came back to their still-shaking studios and kept transmitting live feeds. Others regrouped, salvaged their emergency transmitters and resumed broadcasting from tents.

The BBC Nepali Service was instructed by London to vacate its studio in Naxal, but the local staff defied the order and aired the regular 8:45-9:15PM program that evening. However, as the aftershocks continued everyone was too traumatised to continue working from the studio.

Rabindra Mishra of BBC Nepali Service then spoke to Surya Narayan Shrestha of the National Society for Earthquake Technology (NSET) at Bhaisepati which has rooms set aside for radio precisely for situations like these. The BBC brought in its Portable Production Unit and started broadcasting from NSET its evening and morning programs which are syndicated live through 280 FM stations and has 5 million listeners across Nepal.

Since the earthquake, BBC Nepali has added additional airtime to disseminate essential information on health, sanitation, shelter and survival tips. It has also temporarily started broadcasts on short and medium wave for areas where the FM signal is weak.



RABINDRA MISHRA

LIVE: Ramesh Lekhak of the NC (*left*) and Maoist leader Barsha Man Pun (*right*) being interviewed by the BBC Nepali Service’s Rama Parajuli at the temporary studio in the premises of NSET in Bhaisepati.

NSET’s Bhaisepati Centre is designed to withstand a M8.5 quake and is intended to be an emergency communication nerve centre. It has a contingency plan to serve as an information lifeline to the outside world, as well as reaching the public within Nepal through radio. Even before the quake NSET had prepositioned the Radio Sagarmatha transmitter, but the station could function from its own building this time. State-owned Radio Nepal was on air uninterrupted because its Japanese-built studio was earthquake resistant.

“It has been an ideal partnership for us,” said NSET’s Surya Narayan Shrestha, “the BBC Nepali service has a wide reach within Nepal, and it was a fast and efficient way to get correct information out to the public about the emergency. Radio is the ideal medium during disasters.”

Indeed, BBC Nepali Service reporters have been supplementing round-the-clock programs on Radio Nepal, Radio Sagarmatha and commercial FM stations in Kathmandu. Reporters have fanned out across the 15 districts, highlighting the priority needs of survivors and putting them directly to government officials in Kathmandu.

Mishra was doing a live phone-in interview from the temporary studio one evening last week when an aftershock hit. “I calmly told listeners it was an aftershock, requested them not to panic,” he said. “We try to give correct information and try to have a positive message of hope.”

One BBC story that was widely popular was of a soldier who was digging for survivors in the rubble in Kathmandu even though he had lost his own baby son in his home in Dhading. When asked why he was helping others at a time of personal tragedy, his answer to the reporter was: “Because I am the Nepal Army.” 🇳🇵

Sonia Awale

communication



MADHU ACHARYA

local radio stations. These independent FM stations have many urgent needs: production and broadcast hardware, field recorders, tents, sleeping mattresses, solar chargers, mobile phones, SIM cards and money to pay reporters and keep the stations going.

While the Nepal government can help FM stations in earthquake affected areas by waiving license renewal fees and not taxing annual income this year, humanitarian 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 Nepalis have access to mobile phones and 40 percent listen to radio on their mobile phones. With a majority of young men working in the Gulf, most households in Sindhupalchok have mobile phones. Cell phones are used not just to communicate with relatives abroad, but also to dial call-in programs at radio stations, which have now become the mainstay of local radio stations.

Radio Sindhu broadcasts in Helmu, Nepali and Tamang languages which before the earthquake used to focus on information useful for migrant labourers: how to go about looking for overseas work, what legitimate recruiting companies look like, how to guard against exploitation,

fraud and corruption.

However, in the weeks following the earthquakes, FM stations have changed their programming. Radio Sindhu, for 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 agency processes. Last week Radio Sindhu wanted to produce a program about relief distribution. It got a list of organisations providing health services in Sindhupalchok from the UN office, picked random VDCs from the list, and called Secretaries and political party workers to find out what work the organisations in the UN’s list were doing in that VDC. Neither the VDC secretaries, or the political party workers 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 Nepalis 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, humanitarian organisations will be committing to local accountability and helping make relief distribution, post-earthquake recovery and reconstruction transparent, accountable and responsive to the needs of the local communities. 🇳🇵



Manisha Aryal started the Antenna Foundation Nepal in Kathmandu
manisha.aryal@gmail.com



Avengers: Age of Ultron

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



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

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 wittiness). 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 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.

nepalitimes.com
Trailer



HAPPENINGS



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.



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.



WELCOME, AGAIN: Newly appointed general manager of Nepal Airlines Corporation, Suga Ratna Kansakar (wearing scarves) with airline staff during a meet-and-greet on Tuesday.

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GOPEN RAI

Saving Swayambhu

Among the heritage sites that were damaged in the 25 April earthquake is Swayambhu, 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, Swayambhu 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 Swayambhu may have to be rebuilt. Andolfatto is working with Swayambhu's head priest, Amrit Man Buddhacharya, to make a painstaking inventory of every tiny artefact 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 Swayambhu, 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 Swayambhu for 1600 years, regrets the concern is only about the stupa. "There are 195 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

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, Budanilkantha 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. Bhesh Dahal, director general of Archaeology Department gave his approval for the opening of Kathmandu Darbar Square, Swayambhunath and Patan Darbar 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.

where they still conduct the daily religious rituals. "These people are intangible heritage that keeps the tangible heritage alive," says Andolfatto, who estimates that it may take seven years to restore sites like Swayambhu. He

would like to see Kathmandu shun concrete and rediscover its brick and tile architectural heritage. 

 nepalitimes.com

■ Interview with David Andolfatto 

New ambassadors

The 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 Hillary 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 Athens (US), Um Hong-gill (South Korea), Idurne Pasaban (Spain), Jean Michel

Asselin (France), Wolfgang Nairz (Austria), Ralf Dujmovits (Germany), Nichole Nikki (Switzerland), Katja Starrtjes (Netherlands), and Doc Mc Karr (Britain).


Nepali women mountaineers Mingma Sherpa, Lhakpa Rita Sherpa, Susmita Maskey and Shailee Basnet (*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. 



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.

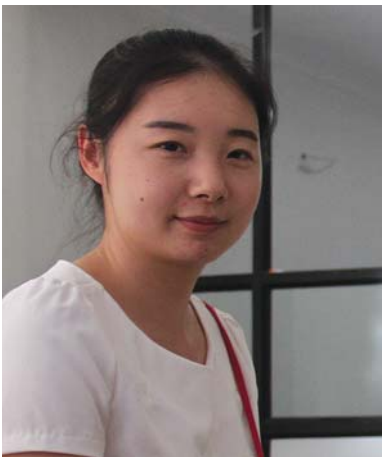
They all perk up if a person who looks like a tourist walks by, and surprisingly, there are still some left. But more often than not the European or Southeast Asian looking foreigners are relief workers wearing uniform t-shirts of their organisations. In the evenings, some bars are open and they are filled with Kathmandu's youth too bored with staying at home.

"I came for a trek, and was in the mountains when the earthquake hit," said American relief worker, Matt as he prepared to leave for the airport in a cab. "I went to Chitwan after I got back and decided to make the best of my stay here. I will definitely be back."

What Thamel lacks in tourists these days, it has made up for with relief workers and Kathmandu-based expats. Cafes like Himalayan Java have benefited from relief groups having their meetings there to coordinate with their Nepali counterparts. Free wifi is an attraction for many. Fire and Ice Pizzeria is back, and tables have to be booked in advance in the evenings.

"Our daily sales have gone down by half, so we have reduced our opening hours," said Harish B Chandra of Himalayan Java, "but I wouldn't say there aren't any tourists. I am sure they will come back as the aftershocks decrease."

Amidst these few relief workers scattered around cafes in Thamel, Kathmandu's young are also filling the missing gap of tourists in trendy cafes and bars. As the day comes to an end, dim lights and the usual low music fill the atmosphere drawing crowds of Nepalis, catching up or getting over post-earthquake blues with a drink.



PICS: KARMA GURUNG

COMING BACK: American tourist Matt (right) says he is leaving Nepal, but is sure to be back. Manager of Shandong Hotel, Elaine Wu, post pictures of Kathmandu online to show Chinese people that the city is safe to visit.

Similar to Pokhara's reaction to the decline in tourism, he hinted of a plan to create special packages and discounts in hotels and enterprises, which will be implemented in the Thamel area.

Down the road in Thamel's Chinatown, Elaine Wu of Shandong Hotel is also optimistic about revival of tourism. Although the hotel did not suffer any damage, it did get cancellations. Before the earthquake all 30 rooms in Shandong used to be occupied daily, mainly by guests from China. Today, there is only 10 per cent occupancy, and the guests are relief workers.

"I have been constantly uploading pictures of my hotel and Thamel online so that people know that it is safe to visit and everything is not destroyed," she said, adding that until the Chinese government's advisory on travel to Nepal is lifted, visitor traffic will not increase.

Many Chinese overland tourists from Tibet are unable to visit the country currently as the roads are blocked. Indian pilgrims booked to go to Mansarovar in Tibet have also had to cancel because of the earthquake. 🇳🇵

While the current tourist season is almost over, the Thamel Tourism Development Council is now preparing itself for the next season in September. "Of the expected number of tourists, only 25 per cent are currently here but now we need to work hard to promote Thamel ahead of the upcoming September season," said Council president, Ram Sharan Thapaliya.

The Council plans to create documentaries about Thamel, and organise conferences in foreign countries where Nepal has embassies to dispel the notion that Thamel and Kathmandu have been destroyed.

Thamel has also hit upon an innovative strategy to bring Nepali visitors from the plains, where it is now 45 degrees in the daytime. This gives new meaning to the term 'domestic tourism'.

Keep moving forward

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



ASK ANJANA ANYTHING

Anjana Rajbhandary

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 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:

askanjanaanything@nepalitimes.com or @AnjyRajy

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?

-GG

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'm not saying we can snap our fingers 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.

Bhaktapur has no choice but to be optimistic

The town of Bhaktapur suffered some of the worst damage to ancient monuments and historic buildings among the Valley's main cities. And although the death toll of 333 in the district was much lower than Kathmandu, the destruction was concentrated in the town's core, where a third of the buildings were damaged.

Today, walking through Darbar Square the streets are devoid of the usual throngs of tourists. Shopkeepers are sitting on steps sipping tea, taking the slump in business in their stride. Although the damage to the town was extensive, many of the ancient monuments survived, including the Palace of 55 Windows and the Nyatapola, the valley's tallest temple.

This gives many here the confidence that the tourists who are very important to Bhaktapur's economy, will return soon.



"Since the earthquake, a lot of people from Kathmandu have come to Bhaktapur to see the the damage, but there haven't been foreign tourists. The policy set by the government to rebuild houses only after two months has halted all reconstruction and in the mean time the rubble sits on the streets."

Abhimanyu Shrestha, shopkeeper



"I use my own page to post photos of my guest house and the Darbar Square and to convince the outside world that it is safe to visit Bhaktapur now. We are open. We can serve."

Sharmila Mulepati, guesthouse owner



"Normally we get around 300,000 tourists a year in Bhaktapur, but this year we expect only 250,000. If that number sounds optimistic, it is because we have to be."

Damodar Suwal, manager of Bhaktapur Tourism Development Office

ALL PICS: KARMA GURUNG

Love in the time of quakes

DEVAKI BISTA

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.

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. “You marry whoever you love, there is no caste, or ethnicity, or religion in love,” she said. “Love can overcome prejudice and crisis.”



JANAASENBRENNEROVA

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



TYING THE KNOTS: Jamuna Neupane and Kumar Rai get married in Sipaghat of Sindhupalchok this week amidst the ruins of their village. Said Jamuna: “You marry whoever you love, there is no caste, or ethnicity, or religion in love. Love can overcome prejudice and crisis.”

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