Sonam Gyaltsen, 74, from Ghoda Tabela miraculously survived when the 25 April earthquake triggered an avalanche that wiped out Langtang village. Nearly 200 people were killed, among them Gyaltsen’s 12 relatives and neighbours. Hundreds of survivors were airlifted to a monastery in Swayambhu, but Gyaltsen has now gone back to Langtang with 15 others to take care of his yaks. There is nowhere else they would rather be than in their holy valley.

BY TSERING DOLKER GURUNG
PAGE 10-11
New years after the end of the conflict and seven years after the first election to an assembly tasked with drafting a new constitution, the four main political parties finally came to an agreement late Monday night on the last pending element of the peace process.

Ostensibly, the deal involved a compromise on an 8-province model for Nepal’s future federal structure. If it was as simple as that, the great wonder is why it took so long for them to hit upon that formula. Which means it was never only about the constitution, but about getting to power, controlling state resources, and taking all the credit.

This week’s nocturnal compromise involved the NC-UML giving up its stand on six territorially-designated provinces, and the Maoist-Madhesi alliance letting go of its insistence that eight future provinces be ethnically demarcated conclaves. They met half-way to allow a concession to decide on boundaries and future federal legislatures and also to name themselves. It is disingenuous that they have bargained as if it was a fish market about an arbitrary number of provinces for provinces without figuring out what those provinces are going to look like or what they are going to be called. However, it was probably the only compromise possible at the present time.

In a sense, what the four parties cunningly did was pass the ball back on the standing brick points on the constitution to someone else somewhere to resolve later. It is the tragedy of Nepal that it needs a major disaster or a violent street uprising to solve it. It is the tragedy of the present time.

All four main political parties got what they wanted from the deal. The NC and the UML had a gentlemen’s agreement that the latter would make way for the UML’s K.P. Oli as soon as the constitution was agreed upon. The NC and the UML had a gentlemen’s agreement that the latter would make way for their 30-party alliance proving that this was never really about federalism or ethnic autonomy. One is to try to see the glass as half-full, then this is a step forward. A national unity government may be formed next month after the CA five-pronged issues. Oli may not be well, but he is more decisive than Koirala, and can hopefully sense a sense of urgency into the reconstruction process. We won’t be as pleasantly surprised, but given the past record of the cast of characters governance and transparency (or the lack thereof) we are not holding our breath on them suddenly becoming an epitome of efficiency and honesty. The same old discredited people are going to be in charge, the thoroughly corrupt all-party mechanism that governed VDCs and DDCs are now going to be replicated on the national stage. It is almost a given that distribution of compensation for earthquake survivors is going to be a repeat of the inequitable way compensation for conflict victims was handed out. We are already seeing terrible delays and obstruction to relief goods getting to those who need it.

This week in Dolakha we saw the enormous task of rebuilding. Of the 59 hospitals and health posts, 53 are destroyed. All 363 schools are damaged. Nearly two months after the quake 80 per cent of the inhabitants of Charikot live in tents. On Charighyang Street buildings look like a pile of Logs blocks. The famous Maoist dictum that there has to be deconstruction before reconstruction has a whole new meaning in post-earthquake Nepal, and not quite in the way Pushpa Kamal Dahal intended.

One way to ensure accountability is to announce local elections right away. That is the only way relief and rehabilitation budgets will be better spent so that everyone benefits and jobs are created in the process. Campaigning for that election itself may be a way to spur candidates and parties to be more responsible to the needs of the people not just in the 14 quake-hit districts but in the rest of the country.

POST-MORTEM

Please stop being an apologist for the incompetency and irresponsibility of politicians (‘Post-moronic’, 28 May). What they say constitution-writing “distracted” politicians? Had they actually been busy doing that we would have had a national unity government long ago. It is the Marvel’s ailing Oli was impatient to become prime minister, UML’s K.P. Oli as soon as the constitution was agreed upon. This week’s nocturnal compromise involved the NC-UML giving up its stand on six territorially-designated provinces, and the Maoist-Madhesi alliance letting go of its insistence that eight future provinces be ethnically demarcated conclaves. They met half-way to allow a concession to decide on boundaries and future federal legislatures and also to name themselves. It is disingenuous that they have bargained as if it was a fish market about an arbitrary number of provinces for provinces without figuring out what those provinces are going to look like or what they are going to be called. However, it was probably the only compromise possible at the present time.

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For politics’ sake

A decision on the number of provinces or forming a national unity government were hardly what 3 million earthquake survivors needed

boundaries and names, leaders have belittled even federalism to a tug-of-war over power and relinquished any responsibility from what is otherwise the most complex issue in the constitution-writing process. Considering the most contested aspects of the federalism agenda have been the names of provinces and their boundaries it’s no wonder that decisions on these have been left for some time in the unforeseeable future.

In particular, one has to hand it to the Masists for their incredible ability to backtrack on and bypass what was the backbone of their political agenda, regardless of who the masterminds behind the deal may have been. Anything for a stint in power and a share of the ‘reconstruction’ pie.

As though politics wasn’t mired by enough redundancy, there is going to be yet another Commission to decide on the delineation of states. Going by past experience one can already imagine the political nightmare that will invite. There is no way to guarantee a transparent and fair process, unmarred by party influence, and thus the likelihood of agreement among the ‘experts’ who will be called upon is scant. That the names have also been left unaddressed is further evidence that the ‘quick-fix’ agreement of 8 June is the outcome of little more than political opportunism.

Contrary to headlines stating that the gateway to a new constitution drafting has finally opened, the only gate that has opened is the one which leads to a change in government — that ‘national consensus’ government which is all the buzz. Needless to say, now is really not the time to be mulling over federal models or unity governments. It would have been one thing if a unity government, for example, was really going to bring the state into urgent action to address the rehabilitation and rebuilding needs of post-quake Nepal.

But we all know that the push for a national unity government, along with agreements on federalism or any other contentious constitutional issue, are more about power hording and dividing up the spoils, more about power hording and dividing up the spoils and less about getting things done together. Actually a unity government is counter-productive at this time when the need for a strong opposition which could hold the government accountable is palpable.

Were the focus on rehabilitation the number one agenda of the political parties and government, it would have got the NPC-suggested reconstruction agency up and running. After all, considering that the authority is really just made up of a bunch of people already in government with only three external experts, it could be formed and active within a day. That might actually push forward the rehabilitation process and make up for the lack of a sense of urgency among leaders to deliver on basic needs in the quake’s aftermath.

Lest the political class need reminding, a decision on number of states or a unity government certainly do not fall under the ‘basic needs’ category. Indeed the constitution has already been delayed long enough and we’re all like one really soon. But having already spent nine years to agree just on an arbitrary digit, one can’t help but feel that these closed door negotiations are not going to deliver to the people an adequate constitution at all.

However, the decision by the Constitutional Political Dialogue and Consensus Committee on Thursday to change the existing citizenship provision which requires both mother and father of an applicant to be Nepali citizens to either one is much welcome.

That said, what we are likely to get is a dozen more changes of government and ministers and several more years spent ‘hammering out’ the details of the federal structure. In the meantime, quake survivors and those without food, shelter or education can wait. @bidush
Confusion and obstruction delay delivery of urgent relief supplies to quake-hit areas

STÉPHANE HUÉT

For the first few days following the 25 April earthquake, everyone in the Nepali government was too shocked to get organised. The state’s preparedness was found to be wanting and there was confusion about what kind of emergency relief was needed most urgently, and where.

Ironically, those first few days without government interference meant that international help came unhindered. Tents, medicine, food, equipment could all be brought in without hassles at customs. It has not been the same since the government started issuing new directives and making rules.

One week after the quake, the Rastra Bank put out a rudely-worded statement warning that any individual donation that didn’t go to the Prime Minister’s Relief Fund would be ‘confiscated’. The PMO clarified that it was only for NGOs set up after 25 April, but the damage was done and Nepal probably lost tens of millions of dollars in aid.

Things were even more confused at customs where officials behaved as if they had no idea about the enormity of the crisis and the urgency with which incoming relief material needed to be flown out to the mountains. In an attempt to coordinate response, on 30 April the government came up with a list of relief materials that were customs-free. But even after the publication of this list, local groups struggled with red tape to get relief through customs at Kathmandu airport and entry points.

A group of Nepalis bringing in 20 tents from India through Biratnagar customs a week after the quake were stopped and told to pay duty. Another group still has 300 tents held up in New York because the courier company wanted assurance that it wouldn’t be detained in Kathmandu. Ten tons of clothes, cooking utensils, and sleeping bags are stuck in Catterick in the UK because the donors can’t afford the 30 per cent tax in Nepal. An educational charity received 300 tents from India, but had to wait 12 days to clear it through Kathmandu airport customs. “They always give a new reason why we couldn’t take the tents,” a frustrated relief worker told us. “They were never clear about what new paperwork was needed.”

Even if tents are on the list of customs-free materials, one charity had to pay warehouse fees to take their equipment out even though the delay was not their fault and the tents were lying outdoors and a third of them were missing.

Indeed, to describe the management of relief supplies at Kathmandu airport’s cargo terminal as ‘chaotic’ would be an understatement (see pic, above). Tents, clothes, and medicines are spilling out of boxes and lie scattered in the open outside the terminal. This correspondent walked right in without an ID card and no one stopped him.

On 3 June the government introduced new guidelines for imported relief supplies under which items on the government’s list can still be imported without paying tax, but they have to hand it over to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) for distribution.

“Organisations which want to distribute imported goods itself has to pay full customs duty,” explained Surya Sedai of the Department of Customs. “This is to minimise the risk of smuggling.”

But not even government units at the border seem to be aware of the list, as Jiwan Rai of Mondo Challenge found out too late on 7 June when he entered Nepal from Darjeeling with solar lamps donated by school children. His local partner, Helambu Education and Livelihood Project (HELP) had assured him there wouldn’t be problems.

After the Armed Police Force at the Kakarvitta border waved him through, a Nepal Police checkpoint at Jore Simal stopped him and said he had to pay import duty on the lamps. Rai was willing to pay, but was told that the lamps would be confiscated because the goods were deemed to have been ‘smuggled’.

We posed this case to Nirman Bhattachari of Jhapa Customs Office, who just said his office was following the government’s new directive.

Jenny Dubin got 250 tents from India to distribute in Dhading via Seva Foundation. The tents were stuck at Sunauli for five days and are now being transported by the Nepal Army (NA) to a ‘central warehouse in Kathmandu. “It’s highway robbery, and offensive to the people who donated, who now have no way to track where the tents they bought go,” Dubin said. “I don’t understand why they cannot distinguish between smugglers and legitimate registered NGOs.”

Army spokesman Brig Gen Jajagir Pokharel said the government had given the army the job of taking relief supplies from Kathmandu to VDCs, not directly to survivors because the government wanted to keep track of what was going where. “We ensure safe transportation,” Pokharel said. “We have the appropriate vehicles to get to these regions where the roads aren’t good.”

Organisations can still distribute imported goods without paying taxes but they have to get permission from several different ministries and register with the National Emergency Operational Centre (NEOC). “We have spent the past six weeks saying the lengthy procedures are unnecessary and delaying delivery of urgent relief supplies to quake-hit areas. “We have been to these areas and we have assessed what is needed where,” Dubin said. Other aid workers said the government has centralised aid, but had no idea where supplies were urgently needed – specific information that they had.

Many remote regions affected by the 25 April earthquake are still in critical need of emergency supplies. An online petition on change.org has requested the Prime Minister to stop levying taxes on imported relief.

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Bureaucracy as usual

REMO is Research and Monitoring System that can capture, analyze and visualize data together. Tremerously useful and cost effective, REMO opens a new frontier on how surveys are conducted. Smartphone-enabled and tablet-compatible, surveys can be created in a fly and modified on the go. Data Collected gets seamlessly aggregated on the system allowing web-based access that dynamically produce meaningful reports in real time. Using complex algorithm, data is instantly converted to intelligence.

For more information on REMO, visit roosterlogic.com.
DHADING: The road to Majhgau is only 28km from the district capital. On a good day, without rain, it takes a four-wheel drive more than four hours to get there. Locals say that the road was once paved. But one wouldn’t know it because there isn’t a speck of asphalt left.

INTERESTING TIMES
Malika Aryal

Buses and trucks lurch and sway as they navigate the cratered surface, one small mistake and they could either get stuck in a pothole or fall off a cliff. One shudder to think what this road will be like when the rains come. Rockfalls already block the road, and there will be more landslides soon.

The village of Majhgau has seen damage too. Most homes, animal sheds and schools buildings are damaged or destroyed. Last week, schools reopened, and that has given the children a sense that things are going back to the way they were. But one wouldn’t know it because there isn’t a speck of asphalt left.

One crisis at a time

Living in a temporary shelter since the quake destroyed his house, Upreti has been working at the transit shelter set up a park for children who are at risk. “My own house was destroyed by the quake, my children haven’t seen me in days,” he says. His staff interrupts the interview. Kathmandu needs a written report on the children who were recently rescued and brought to transit shelters. “Between running around, writing reports, talking to reporters and local organisations, I hardly have time to think about anything else,” says Upreti.

Kathmandu’s coordination and management of the relief efforts has been criticised for being sloppily off the mark and unequal in delivery, but here in the districts there are many selfless civil servants like Upreti that have redeemed the government’s reputation. Upreti understands that the monsoon is going to exacerbate the situation in the villages, but he can’t think about that right now because the needs in the villages are more immediate.

The district capital of Dhading Besi, Child Protection Officer Hari Prasad Upreti has his work cut out. He himself has been living in a temporary shelter since the quake destroyed his house, but that doesn’t deter him from working to help his community. “I haven’t eaten or slept properly since the disaster began,” Upreti says in the five minutes he has away from his work. He spent many nights working at the transit shelter set up at a park for children who are at risk. “My own house was destroyed by the quake, my children haven’t seen me in days,” he says. His staff interrupts the interview. Kathmandu needs a

One crisis at a time

Dhading survivors brace themselves for the rains, but have more immediate worries

Volume up

Prabhu Bank has announced two new schemes: Unnatisil Muddati and Adarsa Muddati for its customers. Both the schemes have maximum annual interest rate of 7.55%, free mobile banking, ATM card and e-banking services. Any person, firm or company can open an account under the Unnatisil scheme with a minimum balance of Rs 100,000. The Adarsa scheme is available for customers over the age of 55 and the minimum balance is Rs 10,000.

Green dealers

Vishal group has been appointed the authorised distributor of TATA Green Batteries for Kathmandu. TATA Green produces inverters, solar panels, two-wheeler and four-wheeler batteries, and heavy commercial vehicles batteries.

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The post-earthquake reconstruction challenges and ensuring the new constitution by consensus are reasons offered by the engineers of the 16-point agreement signed on Monday night to pave the way for a new government by top leaders of the four political parties.

**THE DEADLINE**

Damakant Jayshi

But the real motive was power and how to dispose it up. Behind the new bonhomie between major ruling and principal opposition parties was that everyone got to benefit from the deal.

Parties left out of this power-sharing setup would cry hoarse about betrayal, and that is exactly what happened. Power-sharing and electoral politics has several names in Nepal, one of which is: identity politics. We might likely see more drama on that front. However, in public and among many observers there was a sense of relief. Unless there is some unexpected turn of events (which can’t be ruled out if the past is any guide) the party leaders are finally about to deliver on the long-promised statute. We might get a new constitution by mid-July, the new deadline set by the leaders. This is certainly a cause for cheer and relief but it also invites questions.

First and foremost: federalism. The top leaders of political parties have clearly tried to buy more time but by doing so have tried to take an easy way out. This could have been an excellent opportunity to decide on state restructuring by giving a deserved burial to politics of ethnicity which was rejected by a majority of people in the hills, plains and mountains including in the Madhesi and Janajati strongholds.

By leaving the issue of state demarcation and naming of new provinces for the future, the parties have kept alive the prospect of discord and division which may even impact on the delivery of the delayed constitution. We have seen in the past how forces within and outside the country ganged up against the promulgation of the constitution under various pretexts.

The speed at which the developments of the last few days have unfolded is quite breathtaking. The interests of the Prime Minister and NC President Sushil Koirala, Chairman of UML K P Oli, Chief of UCPN (M) Pushpa Kamal Dahal and the Chairman of Madhesi Janadhi Forum (L) Bijay Kumar Gachchadar have converged for the current ‘breakthrough’. Koitala gets to be a part of history, the leader under whose watch the constitution was delivered by an elected assembly. Oli gets to be the new PM, Dahal gets his share in breaking the deadlock on the statute, and a realistic shot at being the next President of the republic.

Gachchadar would get at least one plum portfolio in the new government, claim to have played a key role and hope to reap dividends during the next few elections. Upendra Yadav and Mahant Thakur might see more gain in trashing the new understanding on federalism and the constitution and keep playing regional politics and stoking the flame of ethnicity with some Janajati groups. But with the wider acceptability for the 8 June agreement meaning more parties jump the sinking ship, they may be sidelined. But these have been politicians are pushing an agenda rejected in the November 2013 election.

The other important question to ponder is about the composition of the new government once the constitution is promulgated. If Monday night’s exercise is any indication, we will be seeing a coalition government comprising at least four of the top five parties in the CA-cum-Legislature/Parliament besides a host of smaller ones. The fourth party by strength, RPP-Nepal led by Kamal Thapa, is the obvious odd man out.

This is a very bad precedent. Opposition parties jockeying to get a share of the pie out of the billions dollar reconstruction aid are failing the people affected by the earthquake. Without a strong and critical opposition, the reconstruction effort will be plagued by corruption, favouritism and inefficiency.

The political parties have still not learned lessons offered so clearly by the mismanagement of the rescue, relief and rehabilitation immediately after the first quake, of 25 April and the major aftershock on 12 May. The absence of locally accountable elected representatives would have ensured a much faster and better delivery of relief materials.

But from cynical commentators and useful idiots, we still hear arguments that local body elections are against federalism. 😡

@damakant

Whatever the reason for the deal on the constitution, at least we have a deal...
The death of Dog Mother

Gyani Deula, a homeless temple-dweller known for her love and compassion towards stray dogs, passed away at the Ganesh Temple in Kamaladi Sunday morning. She was 56.

In November 2012, Nepal Times profiled Deula in an article titled ‘The Dog Mother’, and the moniker Deula had been living at the temple after being abandoned by her family, and earned money selling flowers, most of which she spent to buy food for her beloved dogs every day.

“It’s difficult, but I will provide for them until I die,” the temple-dweller said. “I am the temple family.” Deula told Nepal Times in an interview in 2012. “I worry about them once I am gone, what will my babies do? Who will feed them?”

As Gyani Deula anticipated, the dogs are now helpless yet again. They are hungry and waiting for their mother – probably unaware that Deula has left them forever, when her body was being taken to the funeral on Sunday. Some of the dogs tried to follow the van.

Deula started adopting dogs after she found abandoned puppies in a carton dumped near the temple in 2009. through the years her canine family grew. Gyani Deula had signed a will to donate her real estate to a rabbit sanctuary, and adopted even before the earthquake like Heart Nepal in Pokhara, KAT Centre in Bhaktapur.

The animal welfare group Animal Nepal has been vaccinating dogs in shelters in Bhaktapur and is designing a model quake-resistant shed for livestock to protect them in future earthquakes. “There was great economic loss from the deaths of buffaloes and poultry, so in future we have to make animal sheds seismic resistant too. Since people’s livelihoods are at stake we have to keep animals safe as well,” says Kafle.

Many other organisations that were working with animals even before the earthquake like Heart Nepal in Pokhara, KAT Centre in Bhaktapur and the Bhalakpur Animal Welfare Society are also helping rescue and treat animals. KAT Centre also has a program for adoption of pets and organised a fundraiser.

The thing to remember about the monsoon is that the life-giving rains are incompatible with sudden temperature drop. The day after the temperature drops, the weather becomes cold and the monsoon becomes tedious. Monsoon DOA: 25 June.

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The first thing a visitor notices missing at the entrance to Bhaktapur is the toll gate where tourists were required to pay Rs 1,500 to enter the historic town. Twenty-five per cent of Bhaktapur was destroyed during the 25 April quake, but the town is rising from the dust and preparations are underway to open it again to tourists from 15 June.

Today, Bhaktapur probably looks like what it did before it became such a big tourist attraction. There is damage to its homes and monuments, but the town is once again populated mainly by the descendants of those who built this majestic town.

"Every day I come here for the quiet," said Mohan Bhaila, a French-speaking tour guide who now lives with his sister after his home was destroyed. "For me, this place is my friend. I never get bored here. It is my favourite place."

Stoops and steps along the lane leading down from Darbar Square to Nyatapola are full of shopkeepers sitting around drinking tea. The traditional festivals are still taking place, but without the usual throng of tourists.

Since the municipality has stopped collecting visitor fees, there is no exact count of the number of tourists, but they have been replaced by Nepali visitors who have come to see the destruction. Dinesh Babu Hada, who owns a kulfi stand, is not complaining since his customers are mostly Nepalis.

Despite the damage, many visitors are surprised at how much of Bhaktapur is actually intact. The Nyatapola (pic, right), Nepal’s tallest temple, still stands tall and proves that even though tragedy has struck, what is best endures. So is the Dattatreya Square.

Few tourists have started trickling in, as much to see the earthquake damage as to admire the monuments and Bhaktapur’s unique charm. Some are climbing temple steps for selfies just like in normal times.

Pottery Square was a popular stop for many tourists before the quake, and although much of it is taken up with relief tents and rubble, there is still a thin elderly man who spins his stone wheel inside a doorway near the entrance. He lets visitors take his seat, dip their hands into a bucket of wet clay and spin their own pot. He guides them through the process with his own deft, weathered hands.
For heritage conservationist and Bhaktapur native, Rubindra Puri (pictured, above) the destruction by the earthquake of his hometown was tragic. But he says it provides an opportunity to rebuild the town by adhering even more closely to the Malla-era style that gives Bhaktapur its unique charm.

Puri is surprised how much Bhaktapur’s ancient builders knew about making earthquake resistant housing, pointing to the beams, corners and joints in the clay-mortar and brick houses and temples. “This earthquake proved just how sophisticated the architecture of traditional buildings were to resist sideways and vertical shaking,” Puri told us, showing how the chukul and chaukos were specially designed to withstand earthquakes.

Nearly 20 years ago, Puri bought a dilapidated 175-year-old three-storey house, reinforced the masonry and added tie beams for Rs 1.5 million. His Namuna Ghar (Model House) withstood the quakes without even a crack. His other building, the Toni Hagen House, is intact in a square where most of the older buildings have been damaged.

Puri now wants to restore the entire square to its original Malla-era glory and turn it into a commercial cultural centre so it can boost the economy and create jobs. Most of the bahals, temples and houses restored between 1974-1987 by the German project that Puri was involved in are undamaged. Puri says the houses that went down were the ones that had not been properly maintained.

The Nyatapola temple has now survived four major earthquakes because of the traditional earthquake-resistant design elements that went into building it. It had flexible beams, it wasn’t top-heavy and was lighter as it went higher. Puri says the temple should be studied and serve as a model for future building designs in Kathmandu Valley.

Puri is now trying to ensure that there is no unnecessary and careless demolition of damaged neighbourhoods in Kathmandu Valley. He says: “Many can be restored and renovated, every brick is historic.”

Kunda Dixit
“When can we go home?” That is the question 488 villagers from Langtang ask as they spend another month at the Phuntsok Choeling Monastery (Yellow Gumba) at Swayambhu. The earthquake-triggered avalanche wiped out the entire village killing 175, leaving hundreds missing. Many are disappointed at not having been able to perform the traditional death rituals for lost lives, some want to go back to look for missing relatives, others are concerned with the whereabouts of their yaks. “But, what will we do going back? There is no place to even offer a butter lamp in the name of the dead,” says 65-year-old Tsering Dawa of Kyangjin who lost her brother and sister-in-law. Like most survivors of the Langtang tragedy, Dawa is alive because she was out in the field when the earthquake struck just before noon on 25 April. Dawa’s friend Maya Sangmo, 55, lost 11 family members. Sangmo used to run a tea-house in Kyangjin and was walking towards the bathroom when the earth started shaking. She now lives with her sister and two daughters. Thirty-five year-old Tsering Mingmar (pic, above) is from Langtang Gompa. All the 20 houses in Mingmar’s village were destroyed. She herself lost her 15-year-old son when a rock fell on him, and she broke her arm. Mingmar spent two weeks at Patan Hospital, and is now living at the Yellow Monastery with her husband and two children.

Last week a group of 40 villagers drove up to Syabrubesi and walked for two days to get to Langtang. Despite being advised by government authorities not to go up, they were determined to find the bodies of their relatives and move their yaks to high pasture for grazing. On Sunday, they were able to recover 55 more bodies with the help of the Nepal Army. Although the Phuntsok Choeling monastery is providing

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TSERING DOLKER GURUNG

Survivors of Langtang want to go home, but when?

**Monks**

It was the last day of a series of pujas at the Shechen Monastery in Boudha. Thousands of monks and devotees participating in the prayer ceremony were in the courtyard when the ground started shaking just before noon on 25 April. Immediately, the monks jumped right into action: managing the crowd to prevent a stampede, bringing those inside the main temple out into open spaces, and trying to calm those who were panicking.

Had it not been for their maroon robes, the monks could have easily passed off for professional rescue workers. The reason was that the
Langtang is gone, lament, and nuns to the rescue

The monastery had conducted training in first aid, rescue operations and emergency preparedness precisely in case of an earthquake. The monastery also had a stockpile of emergency supplies and prepositioned rescue equipment and dry foods, blankets, first aid kits, and even loud speakers, which came in handy that day. “We always knew such a day would come and were prepared accordingly,” says Kempo Shehnag, who has been leading the monastery’s relief efforts. Like many other organisations involved in relief and rescue, Shechen’s monks also faced bureaucratic hassles. Obtaining the required paperwork for relief delayed and deterred many motivated monks and nuns who had visited the villages, seen the destruction and wanted to help as soon as possible.

“Every day I had to have three sets of answers ready: for the volunteer monks, for the donors and for the people requesting relief, explaining why help couldn’t be sent,” explains Shehnag.

Even though Shechen Monastery’s main temple suffered damage it has provided shelter and food to residents of Boudha who have lost their homes. Few families from Rasuwa have also camped here and the monastery has been working with its sister organisation, Shechen Clinic and Monastery Development Committee’s non-profit Nepal Share for relief work.

The monastery’s relief has also gone high tech out of necessity. After finding applications didn’t always match that on the ground, the monks now use Quick Maps to do their own research, process paperwork and prioritise villages for relief.

other monasteries in Kathmandu and the affected districts have also sprung into action, and fortunately donations have poured in from all over the world. Young monks of Kopan Monastery donated one of the two blankets they owned, and nuns of Thangu Tara Ani Gumba set up first aid clinics for locals in its only remaining building.

The Buddhist Philosophy Promotion and Monastery Development Committee (BPPMD) estimates that around a total of 1,000 monasteries in Central Nepal collapsed completely and hundreds of monks and nuns are reported to have died in the country.

“Shocked to find my husband had help her by taking her and my nephews to a cave nearby. We heard a foreigner cry for help but couldn’t see him. I tried to follow the sound of his voice when two big rocks crushed my legs and I was trapped. Other rocks continued to hit me on my head and my back. I couldn’t move and was in pain.

I saw the injured tourist to my left asking for water. I cried and cursed God because I couldn’t help. After ten minutes, I couldn’t hear him anymore. He was dead.

I wanted to die and hit myself with a stone. About half-an-hour later my nephews found me and I told them to go back to the safety of the cave. My husband found me a little later and despite his head injuries carried me to Ghoda Tabela. On the way, we saw many injured people and bodies.

My legs were bleeding heavily and I could not walk, my husband had to carry me everywhere and the pain was unbearable. That night we slept out in the open with other villagers.

The next day, a helicopter arrived but only took tourists and some village leaders. People were stepping on me while running to the helicopter to be rescued. I told my husband to go but he said he would rather die with me.

The thought of my two sons in boarding school in Kathmandu helped me stay positive. Three days later, we got on a helicopter to Kathmandu. I was treated at Patan Hospital where I saw myself on TV being interviewed. My son also saw me on TV, and his teacher told me how much he cried.

I lost my mother, my sisters and everything else I owned. I have nothing left to go back to and I don’t know if I will ever be able to walk again. I am not sure whether to consider myself lucky to have survived, or feel unfortunate for becoming a burden to my husband.

As told to Pasang Bhuti of Langtang Disaster Relief Fund.

I am a 75-year-old, with six other family members in this tent (far left) at the monastery grounds (above). Langtang Village (left) was buried under 100ft of boulders, mud and ice after a huge chunk of Langtang Lirung Glacier fell upon it.

A young girl jumps rope at the monastery (top). A team of Japanese scientists are yet to happen. Langtang’s 180 or so nuns who had visited the villages, seen the destruction and wanted to help as soon as possible.

THOUGHTS OF HOME: Tsering Mingmar, 35, and her husband, Tsering Lham, flew with six other family members in this tent (above). Langtang Village (left) was buried under 100ft of boulders, mud and ice after a huge chunk of Langtang Lirung Glacier fell upon it.

Langtang is gone, lament, and nuns to the rescue

the 488 survivors with food and shelter for as long as needed, they only want one thing, and that is to go home. “I feel like I am going to die because of the heat,” says Sangmo, who had worked in Kathmandu for three months in her 20s, but moved back because of the hot weather. “This time I don’t have a choice but to stay here until the authorities tell us it’s safe to go home.”

In a meeting with Prime Minister Sushil Komal, representatives of the Langtang Disaster Relief Fund (LDRF) had requested the government to send geologists to inspect the safety of the affected areas. The PM also promised Rs 40,000 as compensation to each family, both PM also promised Rs 40,000 as compensation to each family, both

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Karma Gurung

A young girl jumps rope at the monastery (above). A team of Japanese scientists and nuns are reported to have died in the country.

“I wanted to die so I started to hit myself with a stone”

KACHUNG, 32

At 9AM, my husband, our two nephews and I started to make our way towards our yak pasture. After an hour, we reached my friend’s tea shop and stopped for tea while my husband continued on. Suddenly the earth shook. At first, we couldn’t understand what was happening.

The tremors got stronger. Within a minute, we heard a very loud bang as if something had exploded, and then we saw an enormous ball of rocks and snow bigger than a house coming towards us. We started running, the sky turned black. I could hardly see anything because of all the dust.

My friend and her husband offered to help her by taking her and my nephews to a cave nearby. We heard a foreigner cry for help but couldn’t see him. I tried to follow the sound of his voice when two big rocks crushed my legs and I was trapped. Other rocks continued to hit me on my head and my back. I couldn’t move and was in pain.

I saw the injured tourist to my left asking for water. I cried and cursed God because I couldn’t help. After ten minutes, I couldn’t hear him anymore. He was dead.

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Ex Machina

It is always a bit alarming to watch films about artificial intelligence coming to life because invariably these films are filled with paranoia even while most science fiction aficionados ought to know better than to descend into that kind of simplicity, especially someone like Alex Garland whose best seller, The Beach was made into a film with the same name starring Leonardo DiCaprio in 2000. Since then Garland has written screenplays for many sci-fi films including Danny Boyle’s excellent zombie flick, 28 Days Later (2002), and Sunshine (2007).

Ex Machina is Garland’s first directorial debut, and while this is a visually beautiful film with what could have been a fascinating premise, Garland messes up by allowing his characters to act in the most obvious possible manner, descending into paranoia at every given opportunity; an inexcusable development given that every single character in this film is a supposed ‘genius’.

The film starts with Domnhall Gleeson as Caleb Smith, a computer programmer who works for the all-powerful Bluebook, the world’s most popular search engine. Gleeson is selected by Nathan Bateman (Oscar Isaac) Bluebook’s enigmatic CEO to pay a visit to his remote hyper secretive home in the wilderness, from where he controls all of Bluebook’s coding and other slightly opaque, possibly nefarious activities.

When Smith arrives by helicopter at Bateman’s vast estate, he is greeted by a fortress like home, and technology that only coding nerds could ever imagine might exist. As Bateman’s reasons for bringing in Smith emerge, the film slowly spirals into a question of intent. Is everybody malicious, or is everyone exactly what they seem? This question is complicated by the fact that Smith has been brought in to conduct the Turing Test experiment to determine whether an object is a person or a computer, and Bateman begins to emerge as an even bigger megalomaniac.

There are some surprises, of course, in how things ultimately play out, however, as mentioned before, bizarrely facile motivations, and general bad behaviour, from both humans and computers, contribute towards an unconvincing and rather superficial land misanthropic film, succeeds only in narrowing things down.

Good science fiction is about opening up a world of possibilities, sadly, this rather superficial and misanthropic film, succeeds only in narrowing things down.
12 – 18 JUNE 2015

Subash Adhikari, a UK-based Nepali architect, worked as a consultant in the Middle East for 12 years after graduating from Cambridge. But after the 25 April earthquake he returned home and now wants to work here.

“An opportunity to return home, be with your family and help rebuild the country,” he says. Adhikari says more Nepalis are now willing to return, and the government just needs to ensure a professional working environment free of political interventions. Many Nepalis working in the desert heat of the Gulf will also return if they are able to earn Rs 25,000 a month here, he says.

India and China have boosted economic growth by encouraging their overseas populations to come back. The 25 April earthquake is an opportunity for Nepal to learn from other countries and its own past. During the Panchayat era, King Mahendra attracted many well-educated and talented Nepali artists, experts and planners. Bhekh bahal, a “94” was in his 28s when he was brought back from college to build new and better Nepal. However, Nepal is much more than expected. We don’t have authorities. The destruction by the earthquake is much more than expected. We don’t have

In order to build a new and better Nepal we will need to get as much help as is needed. Nepal calling

But the UCPN (M) is a distant third party, so it has no problems. If it wants Sushil Koirala that is fine. I don’t oppose the new constitution is written. So, the chair of the second largest party will obviously become the new Prime Minister. But we have yet to make a formal decision on how the NC-UML approach the new government will depend on how the NC-UML approach the new government.

No, there is no pressure on me to step down. I have led the party for the last 25 years. At times, I feel like doing something different, and shared my thoughts with both friends and regarding. But no one has put pressure on me to step down. And when the new constitution is written, there will be new elections. I believe people will reward us for our contribution. So, you do not want to become President? Yes, if the political situation demands that I become a President. Having written a note of disjoint for an executive president, it would not be appropriate.

Some members of the 30-party alliance oppose the deal. “I think you have failed to understand the ground reality,” says Bliss. The 16-point deal is the conclusion of a political course which began after we signed the 12-point agreement in 2005. Even at that time, we had compromised on our powers of ministries while divided with countries facing insurgencies. It is not because we don’t have enough budget to do it on our own and the current Ministry of Finance and mechanism is not enough to handle the collected Nepali and foreign resources. It is not because we don’t have the capacity or because we need to win the trust of donors. Therefore we need a special mechanism to win their trust.

A new mechanism for Nepal

We have not received enough assistance for reconstruction. The Federal Government has contributed to the collected Nepali and foreign resources. It is not because we don’t have the capacity or because we need to win the trust of donors. Therefore we need a special mechanism to win their trust.

But we haven’t received enough assistance for reconstruction. We have not called for assistance for rebuilding and reconstruction yet. There are two problems regarding this. One, it has to be under the government and two, they have to be able to trust us. If we don’t concentrate in these areas and simply think about powers of ministers while building the mechanism, we will not get as much help as is needed.

And the donor nations are not willing to donate or is it us who don’t know how to convince them?

Counties all over the world are going through economic recession. Put the funds are also closed with countries facing insurgencies. It is not easy to bring in assistance and we have to work hard.

How are the preparations for the donor summit going?

The National Planning Commission (NPC) is preparing a needs assessment report and a corresponding budget for reconstruction. We will submit it to the government by 15 June. The NPC is working in coordination with the ministries and donors to prepare a report that is accepted and owned by all.

Most of the international aid seems to be spent on overheads. There are many ways for this; either work with the government or go through budgetary channels. Although not many donor agencies will agree, we will have to include everyone. We have to look to the agencies spending 80 per cent of the aid money for administrative purposes. We cannot allow one area to get all the aid while nothing reaches rural areas.

Will they agree? Yes, if we ask them to work with the government I am sure they will.

Will they reduce overheads? That is why we need to build a trustworthy and responsible mechanism. It will be tough only if we can make them believe that we have a transparent and efficient system in place for reconstruction. It looks like the donor agencies want a similar mechanism to the one we are proposing. They want the government and non-governmental agencies as well as civil society and private organizations to help.

Many are pointing out to the dangers of people living in tents permanently just like in Haiti. That is why we need to rebuild the people to nearby places where they can earn a living. Unlike Haitian victims, a majority of survivors here are farming families. We should not make the survivors dependent on aid, most help them increase their capacity to earn. That is why we need to work with the government or go through budgetary channels. Although not many donor agencies will agree, we will have to include everyone. We have to look to the agencies spending 80 per cent of the aid money for administrative purposes. We cannot allow one area to get all the aid while nothing reaches rural areas.

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Is what your personal future plan? My dream was to write a progressive constitution. I think I am now closer to fulfilling my dream. I now want to use my time and energy for the country’s economic prosperity.

But you are unlikely to assume executive power, how can you contribute to the country’s economic growth just as a political party leader?

Our party was for a deputy elected executive president. We are still convinced that the existing parliamentary system is not good for our country. But we failed to push that agenda. So, I want to lead Nepal as an executive chief for five years, if not as a directly elected president.

So, you do not want to become President? In the political situation I don’t want to become a president. Having written a note of disjoint for an executive president, it would not be appropriate.

You will accept Sushil Koirala as the new Prime Minister? Not long ago, your party had dubbed UML leader as the party chair. If it wants Sushil Koirala that is fine. I don’t oppose the new constitution is written. So, the chair of the second largest party will obviously become the new Prime Minister. But we have yet to make a formal decision on how the NC-UML approach the new government will depend on how the NC-UML approach the new government.

Lastly, how long will it take to rebuild Nepal? About five years.

Nepal carpenters, electricians, masons, plumbers, steel fixers and engineers working in the Gulf will be more than happy to return home, provided that they get decent salaries.

But Nepali politicians are too busy in their power games to pay attention to this urgent need. Chief Secretary Lilamani Poudel admits that the government has so far failed to tap this opportunity. “We lack a strong and visionary leadership, which is ready to give jobs to competent Nepalis,” Economist Koshal Acharya thinks it is unfathomable that the government is still devoid of ideas to bring home Nepalis. “This situation is like a mess when you don’t know where its scent gland is,” he says. “Nepalis working abroad are capable of telling the country from the ruins, and we just need to give them a call.”

Daniel Guzman, an expert on migration and remittance economy, identifies three classes of Nepalis who are willing to return home: those who are better-off abroad but struggling with identity crisis, those who want to make more money abroad and those who just go abroad to earn money. “The government needs to show them what they want: respect and responsibility, an investment climate and decent salaries,” he says.

“Everyone knows there are no permanent friends or enemies. But Nepali politicians are not very clear on how the NC-UML approach the new government will depend on how the NC-UML approach the new government.”}

“Nepal calling”

from the Nepali press

“Why do you interpret the remarks literally? That was just a symbolic. Besides, we are getting back at Gil or calling us names. If the party is talking positive about us, why would we be negative about them?”

Will you back Oli as the new Prime Minister?

Prime Minister Sushil Koirala has publicly said that he will resign after the new constitution is written. So, the chair of the second largest party will obviously become the new Prime Minister. But we have yet to make a formal decision on how the NC-UML approach the new government will depend on how the NC-UML approach the new government.

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Sheltering women

Most survivors in temporary shelters are women, and they are worried about privacy and security

SAHINA SHRESTHA
in SINDHUPALCHOK

Hundreds of thousands of families displaced by the earthquake are trying to survive from day to day, finding shelter from the heat and rain. Most of those who live in temporary shelters are women, and they also have the additional worry of keeping families fed, babies healthy as well as looking after their own security.

Women interviewed in shelters in some of the 14 districts affected by the quake say one of their main concerns is the lack of privacy and safety. Ranjana Majhi is 17, and has to wait for nightfall to change her sanitary napkin, duck behind a tree or slip into a nearby forest. The 25 April earthquake not only destroyed all 30 houses in Majhi Gaun 80km northeast of Kathmandu, but almost all their outhouses.

“It is difficult when we have our periods especially when we have to use cloth instead of sanitary pads,” says Ranjana Majhi. “We are not allowed to use the remaining toilets because they are unsafe, so we have to go into the forest at night to change.”

Miji Majhi’s two-month-old daughter has not been well ever since the earthquake, and she is trying her best to look after her under a tent. “The floor is cold and there are bugs, and dirt,” she says.

A few houses away, Amrita Majhi (pictured, below at left) is unable to breastfeed her new-born baby boy. “They say there is baby food in the city, but we haven’t got any here,” says Amrita, who went hungry for four days after the quake. The two other new mothers in the village also do not have access to proper nutritious food. Asali Majhi is three months pregnant and is constantly plagued with stomach pain and has not had an appetite since the earthquake. Pramila Majhi, who is six months pregnant worries about her delivery. “I may have to give birth to my baby out in the open,” she says.

An estimated 3.2 million people in 14 districts were affected by the earthquake, and 125,000 of them are women of reproductive age. There are said to be at least 126,000 pregnant women in the affected districts, most of them living in temporary shelters. As many as 21,000 may need obstetric care within three months.

“Vulnerable groups like women have not been prioritised while distributing relief materials,” says Lily Thapa of Women for Human Rights (WHR). “Since women, especially single mothers cannot queue in line for relief materials they are mostly ignored.”

WHR has opened Chhahari shelters for lactating mothers, pregnant women and their families. Mothers and newborns are provided with food, medical care and relief packages including warm clothes and blankets. In coordination with UN Women, WHR also distributed 100 ‘dignity kits’ which contain basic clothing, soap, undergarments, nail clippers, toothbrush, torch light and other essentials to girls and women in shelters in Kathmandu and Bhaktapur.

Single women including widows and women whose husbands are away for foreign employment are also vulnerable as they are responsible for their households, clearing debris of destroyed homes, rebuilding temporary shelters and running after relief supplies.

Women who had been abandoned by their husbands’ families before the earthquake have also found themselves homeless, and need temporary housing. “Most women are now worried about how to retrieve legal documents from the ruins of their homes,” says Thapa. “Many are not aware about where to go for help.”

Security is another factor weighing women’s minds, even though police say there haven’t been too many cases of sexual harassment. “We are living in a tent with strangers. Every time new people arrive in the tent, I am worried something might happen,” says Tulasa Kuwar, who is still living in Kathmandu’s Tundikhel because she cannot find a rented flat she can afford.

Kuwar’s other concern is the lack of privacy to take a shower or change clothes. According to Ram Prasad Bhattarai of the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, the government is working on an action plan to build safe houses and provide psychosocial counseling for women who are in need.

nepalitimes.com
Hotel Paradise
12 May earthquake that destroyed Charikot

KUNDA DIXIT
IN DOLAKHA

What used to be Hotel Paradise is now lying on its side, its five floors compressed into a narrow space sandwiched between two tilted buildings. Other tall concrete structures in the prosperous Charighyang neighbourhood of this town 120km east of Kathmandu fell like dominoes.

Nima Sherpa surveys what is left of Hotel Paradise with the dazed look of someone who still can't fully comprehend how the earthquakes turned his life upside down. Hotel Himalaya, which he also owned on the same street, is also distraught. Like all other people here still live in tents.

“Everyone is suffering, so I can’t ask people to help me.” (right)

Hotel Paradise took two weeks to demolish what is left of it. There were no lawsuits from the insurance companies. The government is demolition of damaged buildings. We cannot do it ourselves.”

Dolakha’s district capital prospered from the region’s emergence as the hub for hydropower and tourism. Many tall concrete structures had come up in the past decade, some of them soaring 11 storeys high. More than half of them are too damaged to live in, and nearly two months after the quakes 80 per cent of the people here still live in tents.

Anil Hamal is an engineer with National Society for Earthquake Technology (NSET), and was going house-to-house with a GPS locator last week in Charikot. He was shocked by what he saw: “Most structures did not follow the building code, the soil is not suitable for tall buildings and the slope is too steep.”

Up the road, the Charikot Panorama Resort is also in ruins. Only two of the five well-appointed bungalows built in the traditional style are serviceable, and international relief agencies have pitched tents in the garden to make this their base camp.

“My parents used traditional architecture to build this place with local stone and slate 20 years ago, we have salvaged most of the damaged buildings. We cannot do it ourselves.”

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“Everyone is suffering, so I can’t ask people to help me.” (right)

Dolakha, the 25 April quake was a foreshock. The 12 May event, with its epicentre just 15km northeast of Charikot, was actually the main earthquake that caused most of the damage.

That day, Sherpa had brought engineers to inspect Hotel Paradise and they had just declared it safe. They were across the street when there was a violent jolt, then everything swayed and tilted. A neighbour’s taller building leaned over and sent Hotel Paradise crashing down. Five women fleeing to an open space were crushed, and their bodies only recovered a week later.

“The neighbour, Nabin Shrestha, is also distraught. Like all other buildings on this street, his is uninhabitable. The priority for many urban areas in the 15 quake-affected districts like Charikot now is demoliton of damaged concrete structures to make streets safe. But Nepal has neither the equipment nor the experts to do that. “They say we have to wait three years, what are we going to do for three years?” asks Sherpa. “I don’t even have the money to tear down the buildings. But at least the land is mine and maybe I can get a soft loan for reconstruction.”

Shrestha adds: “We don’t even expect compensation, what we need help with from the government is demolition of damaged buildings. We cannot do it ourselves.”

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Survival of the altruistic

Studies show altruistic behaviour increases the production of the feel-good hormone oxytocin

**ANJANA RAJBHANDARY**

Three weeks ago a column in this paper disapproved of people increasingly sharing relief selfies on social media to seek validation, and an effort to be ‘mini-celebrities’. The piece generated a lively debate about the pros and cons of publicising charity work.

Many readers wrote back saying that the display of helpful acts encouraged others to join in to help, and to prove to others that they were doing work on ground. A similar argument was made that lop-sided media coverage that highlighted suffering and misery in fact helped in fund-raising for earthquake survivors.

“I believe we should help those in need because someday I may need help too. The universe balances everything,” said Jovan Paunovic, an entrepreneur from Serbia who supported Nepal during the earthquake without making it a big post on social media. “But does altruism really exist? I guess it’s a philosophical discussion.”

Studies have shown that any form of charitable act increases the level of the hormone oxytocin – the ‘feel good’ hormone also called the love, hugging or holiday hormone since it tends to be secreted when someone is helping others. Helping others also triggers secretion of dopamine and endorphins.

The definition of altruism is the belief in or practice of disinterested and selfless concern for the well-being of others. There are many benefits to being altruistic: it promotes the emotional, mental, physical and spiritual well-being of a person. It helps build connections and relationships, and altruistic people live longer lives.

Prajesh Shrestha of the Kathmandu-based non-profit Daayitwa said, “I felt surviving the earthquake gave us a second life and people needed immediate help. At a time like this, it may be okay to help and promote oneself but I did not think of it that way.”

Overall, the act of giving uplifts our consciousness. So, if helping others makes us feel good does it defeat the whole point of selfless help? We could feel happy and perhaps choose not to plaster it on social media.

Manish Shrestha of Kazi Studio who went to Chunikhel on 26 April said, “The reason I took a picture of my friend and posted it on Facebook was because I thought what he was doing was good and the world needed to see it.”

Shrestha does not judge people who post their own pictures. “If self promotion is their motivation to help, it is better than no help – it just wasn’t my motivation,” he added.

Oxytocin boosts one’s self esteem and confidence, which could be one reason why people think it is acceptable and normal to inform family and friends of their contribution to the community, country and the world.

Sagun Joshi of Global Bank added, “Making the world aware of the disaster and the condition of Nepal is helpful but I am not particularly satisfied with showing everyone what one has done.”

A University of Amsterdam study, however, shows that higher levels of oxytocin while prompting people to show special treatment towards their own community, can also cause aggression towards competing groups. Could this be the reason why some people feel the need to help more than their rivals?

From a classical economic perspective, altruism may not exactly make sense but from an evolutionary point of view research has shown that individuals only exhibit altruistic behaviour to make themselves more effective and stronger with more long-term benefits. Even Darwin suggested that altruistic groups may have a greater chance of survival.

Said Francisco Lopez, Sergeant at United States Marine Corps who was in Nepal during the 25 April earthquake: “I helped because I have the knowledge and training. It is not something I think about, for me, helping is a natural and subconscious reaction to a need. I didn’t think to tell anyone what I did.”

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