

NEPALI Times

#762

12 - 18 June 2015

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TAKE ME HOME

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

BIKRAM RAI



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‘DECONSTRUCTION BEFORE RECONSTRUCTION’

That famous Maoist dictum has a whole new meaning in post-earthquake Nepal, and not quite in the way Pushpa Kamal Dahal intended.

Nine 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 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 commission to decide on boundaries and future federal legislatures and also how to name themselves. It is disingenuous that they have bargained as if it was a fish market about an arbitrary number 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 buck on the remaining sticking 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 shake things up. This time the ruse of the need for a national unity government for reconstruction injected a sense of urgency that removed the impasse on power-sharing.

All four main political parties got what they wanted from the deal. The NC and the UML had a gentlemen’s agreement that Prime Minister Sushil Koirala would make way for the UML’s KP Oli as soon as the constitution was agreed upon. The ailing Oli was impatient to become prime minister, but for that Koirala had to step down which required the constitution to be passed first. Koirala needed a graceful way to step down, and wanted to bequeath a historical legacy to



bolster his stature at the upcoming party conclave. “Let’s go for eight, then,” a downcast and evasive Koirala is supposed to have said at the four-party meeting on Tuesday morning.

Pushpa Kamal Dahal of the UCPN(M) missed being at the centre of things, and by dangling carrots in front of Oli assured him of backing for prime ministership if it was going to be a government of national unity that included his party. Bijay Kumar Gachhadar of the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (L) is in it only because he has an eye on a key portfolio in the national government. In doing this, Dahal and Gachhadar dumped 28 members of their 30-party alliance proving that this was never really about federalism or ethnic autonomy.

If 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 finishes procedural issues. Oli may not be well, but he is more decisive than Koirala, and can hopefully inject a sense of urgency into the reconstruction process. We want to be 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 persona 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 Lego 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 responsive to the needs of the people not just in the 14 quake-hit districts but in the rest of the country.

YOUR SAY

www.nepalitimes.com

POST-MORTEM

Please stop being an apologist for the incompetency and irresponsibility of politicians ('Post-mortem of a disaster', Editorial, #761). There is no excuse for being unprepared for an earthquake with decades-long warning. How can you say constitution-writing "distracted" politicians? Had they actually been busy doing that we would have had a constitution by now, and not just a 16-point agreement that fails to solve much of the contested issues.

Abhishek B

■ Is it really necessary to scare people as nobody can tell when the next big one will come?

Claudine Bonis

■ That is a scary editorial. Please verify your sources.

Prajwol Shrestha

POLITICAL TECTONICS

"Leaders" - there is not one worthy of the title in Nepal ('Political tectonics', Anurag Acharya, #761). Even this earthquake couldn't shake them up showing there is little hope for speedy rebuilding or development. For our ministers it's always pocket and power before the people and the country.

James McGuinness

■ A country with well-established rules/principles/system can function without a constitution, but not Nepal. There are some good leaders within the four major parties but they are outnumbered by selfish, corrupt and power-hungry politicians whose only ambition is to become a PM. Given the current leaders' credentials, effective government is a far cry in Nepal. Thus we need a constitution to give the country some form of stability.

TC Ghimire

RADIO ACTIVE

All praise and admiration for these dedicated radio reporters to keep the most vital relief supply: providing information and encouragement to the public ('Radio active after the quake', Sonia Awale, #761). Salute to Nepal's journalists for being on the air despite all odds.

Dirk

■ Thanks for the great map showing locations and status of radio stations.

Jens

RAM SHARAN MAHAT

'What's wrong in hiring a foreign company that is efficient and can improve our immigration procedures? ('We need help to rebuild Nepal', #761)'. Everything. Why hire foreign professionals when we have talented

people in the country in need of jobs? Need to change your thinking, Mr Mahat.

AD

■ Our honorable minister doesn't realise the huge credibility gap between Nepal government, Nepali people and the international community.

Airline Guy

■ Hardly anyone I know donated to the PM's relief fund, no one trusts you, your party and the government.

Hari Prasad Sharma

■ Why can't we do this ourselves, we just need to reform and remove the corruption. Why hire a foreign company when we need the money ourselves so badly? If this how an educated Nepali leader thinks, then only God can help us. You cannot improve TIA, yet you dream of improving Nepal.

Bishnu Ghimire

PEOPLE FIRST

The government should have consulted with India and China before setting the time table for the donor's conference ('Follow the people', Bihari Krishna Shrestha, #761). Why did our government ignore our neighbours when Indian PM Modi had already proposed to the Chinese President about working jointly for rebuilding Nepal? Has our diplomatic policy collapsed? Have the

concerned institutions become naive? Or do the bosses think they know everything and don't listen to wise counsel?

Jim Morgan

■ Bravo! Hope the newly energised youth groups learn from your experience.

Abishek B

LOVE MARRIAGE

Beautiful story and powerful photos ('Love in the time of quakes', Devaki Bista, #761). All the best to the newly-weds!

Lucie Carole

■ Nepalis are very strong people and will always find ways to live happily despite adversities.

Neelu Mainali

■ Wonderful story, and even more wonderful photos by Jana Ašenbrennerová of a very happy young couple. Their radiant smiles touched us all.

Shyam

#VISITNEPAL

Some of tourists left just before the quake but came back to help ('Waiting and watching', Karma Gurung, #761). I also met many people who are here for the first time and loving Nepal.

Cathy Grogan

Times

THIS WEEK



JANA AŠENBRENNEROVÁ

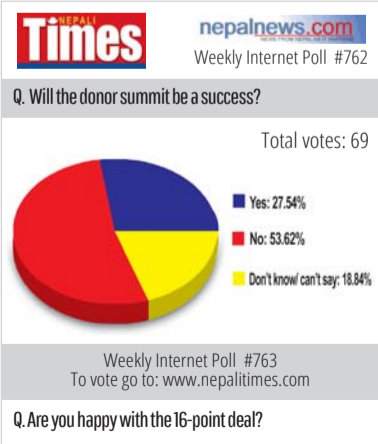
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Most visited online page
Love in the time of quakes by Jana Ašenbrennerová (7,132 views)

Most commented
Love in the time of quakes by Devaki Bista (14 comments)



For politics' sake

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



BIKRAM RAI

If newspaper headlines over the past week are anything to go by, Nepal is returning to politics as usual. In fact, one cannot really distinguish the coverage of the past week from those of, say, two years ago.



ONE TO MANY Bidushi Dhungel

They all sound the same: highlighting an 'almost-reached' consensus among the four major forces, an 'almost-formed' unity government, 'nearly-agreed' on federal structure and how

'contentious' constitutional issues are being 'hammered out'. There was news about quake victims and lost blankets, relief siphoning, too. But these were covered as if they were happening in some other country, and the leaders had a completely different agenda.

On Monday, after over seven years of squabbling the Big Four finally agreed on a number: 8. That number would have held more significance were there not 3 million quake-affected people to think about. What's worse, the rationale for the magic number eight is a complete mystery, random even.

It has once more exposed the crude nature of power politics in Nepal. Without any agreement on

boundaries and names, leaders have belittled even federalism to a tug-o-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 Maoists 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 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'd 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

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Bureaucracy as usual

Confusion and obstruction delay delivery of urgent relief supplies to quake-hit areas

STÉPHANE HUËT

For the first few days following the 25 April earthquake, everyone in the Nepal 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 in 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 that 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.



STÉPHANE HUËT

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 gave 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 Bhattarai 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 Jagdish 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 seven different ministries and register with the National Emergency Operational Centre (NEOC). Aid workers in the field for the past six weeks say the lengthy procedures are unnecessarily 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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One crisis at a time

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

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
Mallika 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 shudders 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. "We are still talking about the earthquake all the time, but we are now also slowly talking about how to rebuild our homes," says seventh-grader Roshani Itani. Like the rest of the villages in the quake-hit districts, Majhgau is ready to move on, look ahead.

The government, too, is impatient to move on to the reconstruction phase. An international donor conference slated for 25 June will focus on finding the money for rebuilding. But even though the relief operation is supposed to be over,

the monsoon may necessitate rescue and relief all over again as floods and landslides are made worse by the unstable slopes.

This year's monsoon is going to be especially hard for the country and the 15 quake affected districts. Nepal's meteorologists announced earlier this week that this year's monsoon has been pushed back by another week. There is a lot of talk, at least in the capital, about how the government and organisations working on reconstruction need to take advantage of this 'window of opportunity' to use the extra week to get preparations in place.

In the district capital of Dhading Besi, Child Protection Officer Hari Prasad Upreti has his work cut out. He himself has been



DEEPEENDRA BAJRACHARYA

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 free 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

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 slow 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 hospital is still full of quake-injured patients, children are still at risk of infections, and relief still needs to get to remoter parts of Dhading.

If rebuilding is to happen properly, Kathmandu needs to keep up the morale of its bureaucrats in the villages. This is critical because people like Upreti are the backbone of the effort to save lives of children and young mothers.

No one needs to tell the people of Dhading to prepare for the rains. They know it is around the corner, and they anticipate it with a mixture of joy and dread. It allows rice planting, but it also brings landslides and epidemics. This year, it could be worse.

Says Upreti: "Yes, we know about the monsoon dangers. But our needs are so immediate that we can't think beyond the next few hours, the end of the day. We just deal with one crisis at a time."

@mikaness

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS



Premium drink

Himalayan Brewery has launched its Kathmandu Premium Lager Beer, which consists of 100% two row malt, German hops and Danish yeast. It comes in a brand new packaging with an attractive label.

Volume up

CG electronics has launched two new products: Sound Bar CG-SB 52 and CG-SB 52W in the market. Both the designs come equipped with Bluetooth connection, LED display, remote control, FM radio, USB disc and SD card. The products are priced at Rs 7,790 and Rs 9,690 respectively.



Number eight

Qatar Airways has announced its eighth route to Saudi Arabia. Beginning 2 September, the airlines will begin flights to Abha from Doha, four times a week.

New schemes

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 Adarsha 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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BIKRAM RAI

Whatever the reason for the deal on the constitution, at least we have a deal

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 divvy 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 Janadhikar Forum (L) Bijay Kumar Gachchadar have converged for the current 'breakthrough'.

Koirala 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 30-party ship, they may be sidelined. But these has-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

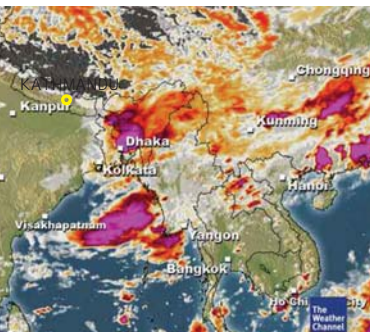


NEPAL WHEREVER YOU ARE.

Times

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PICS: ANIMAL NEPAL



SENTIENT BEINGS: A vet injects a painkiller to a dog with fractured leg in Kalleri of Dhading last month (*left*).

A pregnant buffalo with a fractured leg being treated in Babiya Village of Lalitpur recently (*above*).

Animals also suffered

SONIA AWALE

Besides the tragic toll on human life the earthquake also killed tens of thousands of livestock, pets and poultry. An estimates 150,000 chicken, 8,000 water buffaloes and cows and 14,500 pigs and goats died in the quakes. The 15 earthquake-affected districts were major dairy and

poultry producers, and thousands of farmers were left destitute when cows and buffaloes were crushed in their sheds and poultry farms came down. In the towns, pets were injured and many were abandoned in homes as families moved to shelters. In Kathmandu Valley, many donkeys were killed as brick kilns where they worked collapsed. Dairy is the main livelihood of farmers in Kavre, and the

district bore the brunt of the loss of buffaloes and cows. Sindhupalchok, Nuwakot and Dhading suffered huge losses in the poultry industry when tens of thousands of chicken were killed in the quakes. “Many people tell us why are you taking care of animals when there are people who are in need,” says Uttam Kafle of the group, Animal Nepal, “but we tell them for many farmers livestock is their

whole life. If their buffaloes die, they can’t feed their children and send them to school.” Most animals with spinal injuries were dead by the time Animal Nepal teams of vets reached remote villages in Kavre and Sindhupalchok. But those with limb injuries and fractures were treated. Animal Nepal worked with World Vets to treat 425 animals in the 15 districts. Companion animals like dogs which were left at home after their owners went to shelters ended up in the streets in search of food. “We got phone calls from some people asking us to adopt their dogs temporarily since they

were in shelters,” added Suraj Thapa, also of Animal Nepal. Other families took their dogs with them to shelters. Animal Nepal has been vaccinating dogs in shelters in Bungameti 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 Budhanilkantha and the Bhaktapur Animal Welfare Society are also helping rescue and treat animals. KAT Centre also has a program for adoption of pets and organised a fundraiser. 🇳🇵



TRISHNA RANA

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 stuck and charities carried out fund-raisers her and her four-legged friends. 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, they are my family,” she had 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 and love 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 eyes and a team from Tilganga Hospital extracted her corneas before her cremation. After the news about her death spread on social networking sites, many who knew of her compassion and devotion to dogs went to Pashupati Aryaghat to attend her funeral and bid her goodbye. The animal welfare group Animal Nepal (*see above*) is planning to build a temporary shelter for the dogs, and until then to send a volunteer to feed them daily at the Ganesh temple. 🇳🇵

nepalitimes.com
■ The dog mother, #629

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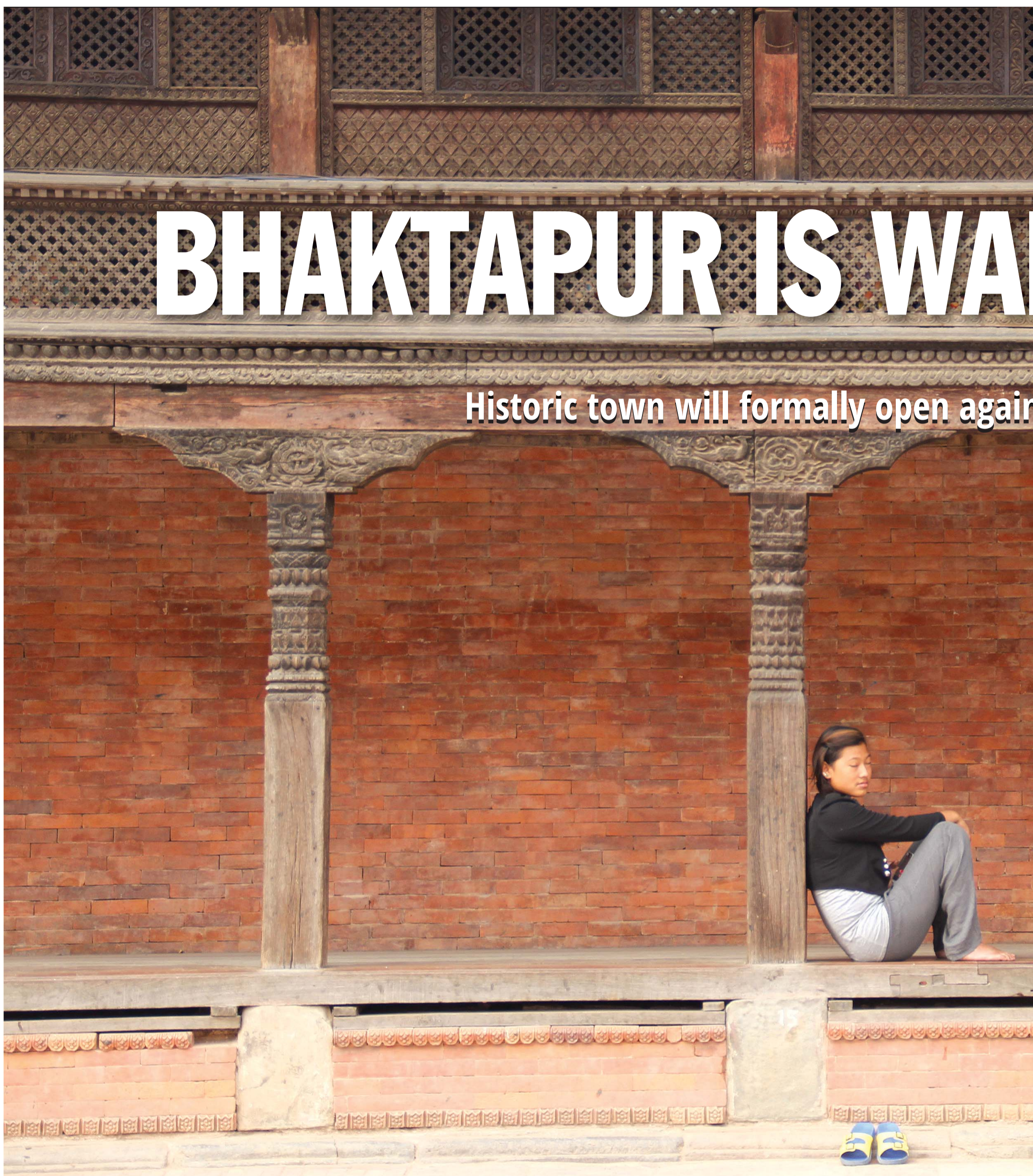
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BHAKTAPUR IS WA

Historic town will formally open again



PEREGRINE FRISSELL
in BHAKTAPUR

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.





ATING FOR YOU

n to visitors from 15 June

A third of Bhaktapur's guest houses have not been able to open, either because of structural damage, owners having to live in tents, or simply because there are no tourists.

However, some popular lodges have opened, so this may be the time to visit Bhaktapur to see how it is coping with the disaster, and help its economy.

Sharmila Mulepati of the Pagoda Guest House which overlooks the Darbar Square says only two of her 19 rooms are occupied. "Even the relief workers have come and gone, and we are short-staffed, but there are reservations starting August," she said.

The handicraft shops that used

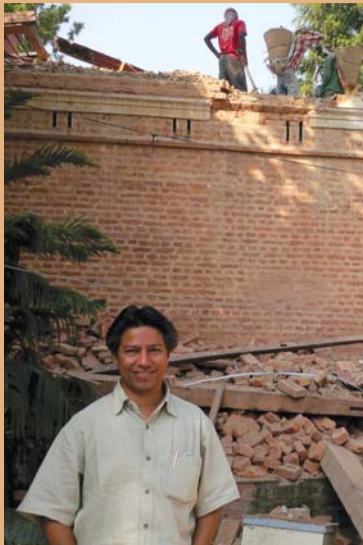
to do brisk business are open, but there are few customers. Rajendra Shrestha of Masterpiece Handicrafts told us that he used to be open 15 hours a day, but now opens only four hours in the middle of the day. He hasn't had a customer all week.

The Bhaktapur Tourism Development Committee is carrying out a damage assessment of the lodges, shops and cafes so it can help them rebuild. Bhaktapur normally gets 300,000 visitors a year, bringing in Rs 150 million just in fees, but this year the number is expected to go down.

But Tourist Information Officer Damodar Suwal says he is optimistic: "We have to be." 🇳🇵



PICS: KARMA GURUNG



"Every brick is historic"

For heritage conservationist and Bhaktapur native, Rabindra 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 retrofitted, every brick is historic." 🇳🇵

Kunda Dixit



BIKRAM RAI

A LONG WAIT

Survivors of Langtang want to go home, but when?

TSERING DOLKER GURUNG

"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 Gumpa. 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



SHECHEN.ORG

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



BIKRAM RAI



LANGTANGDISASTER.ORG

THOUGHTS OF HOME: Tsering Mingmar, 35 and her husband, Sedar live with six other family members in this tent (*far left*) at the Yellow Monastery in Swayambhu which has provided shelter to nearly 500 survivors from Langtang.

A young girl jumps rope at the monastery grounds (*above*).

Langtang Village (*left*) was buried under 100m of boulders, mud and ice after a massive chunk of Langtang Lirung Glacier fell upon it.

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

KARCHUNG, 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 broke her hand and I tried 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.



LANGTANGDISASTER.ORG

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 more 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.

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 Koirala, 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 are yet to happen.

A team of Japanese scientists surveyed Kyangjin, Langtang, and

Rimche, and deemed them safe. “But we want a nod from the government for reconstruction,” says Finjo Lopchan of LDRF.

The Fund has received Rs 4 million in donations, and was set up by Langtang native Pasang Bhuti based in Spain. Bhuti's mother is among those killed in the village.

The group is supporting women by providing them with raw materials to make local handicraft products like gloves and socks that will be sold online through the websites of Sustainable Steps to Nepal and LDRF.

“Even if it is just a small amount, the women will feel they are contributing something to rebuilding the village rather than just feeling helpless,” says Lopchan of the initiative.

Another reason the Tibetan-

Buddhist community does not want to stay at the monastery too long is to avoid disrupting the Gumba's monastic life.

“Small things, like having to share taps with women and children does bother our monks, but we believe now is the time to help and not think too much about such things,” says Gelek Gyathar, the head monk at Phuntsok Choeling.

On Friday, villagers will gather at Boudha to commemorate the 49-day rituals for all lives lost. All will have wished to have the memorial in Langtang, that is no longer there. 🇳🇵

langtangdiaster.org

 nepalitimes.com

- Langtang is gone, #756
- Langtang lament, #758

and nuns to the rescue

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 pre-positioned 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 Khenpo Shelnang, 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 Shelnang.

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

non-profit Nepal Share for relief work.

The monastery's relief has also gone high tech out of necessity. After finding that the situation presented in request applications didn't always match that on 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 (BPPMDC) estimates that around a total of 1,500 monasteries in Central Nepal collapsed completely and hundreds of monks and nuns are reported to have died in the country.

“We are all victims: some of us are still in shock but as we got more information of the damage caused outside Kathmandu, we knew we had to go out and help,” said Tulku Urgen Dorji, who travelled with relief supplies to villages in Nuwakot and Gorkha. 🇳🇵

Karma Gurung



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



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

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 (an experiment to determine whether an object is a person or a computer) on Ava (played by newcomer Alicia Vikander) - an artificial intelligence who is as charming as she is perceptive; Ava can tell when you lie.

As one might imagine, things start to go awry as Smith becomes attached to Ava, 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 obvious conclusion that leaves a rather bad taste in one's mouth.

Good science fiction is about opening up a world of possibilities, sadly, this rather superficial land misanthropic film, succeeds only in narrowing things down.

nepalitimes.com
■ Trailer

HAPPENINGS



LEFT AT RIGHT: Prime Minister Sushil Koirala meets with visiting Communist Party of India leader Sitaram Yechury (right) at Baluwatar on Wednesday.



DR PRESIDENT: President Ram Baran Yadav with Nepal Army personnel of the Bhairabi Dal Battalion involved in earthquake relief in Gorkha on Tuesday.



LEFT OUT: Disgruntled members of the 30-party alliance excluding the UCPN(M) and MJF(D) on Tuesday decided to boycott the CA session expressing opposition to Sunday's 16-point agreement.



TO REBUILDING: Information and Communication Minister Minendra Rijal hands over a cheque for school rebuilding in Gorkha on Tuesday.



ACTION AID: Action star Jackie Chan receives a rose from an earthquake survivor at a temporary camp in Jawalakhel on Tuesday. Chan arrived in Kathmandu with a Chinese red-cross team.

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Himal Khabarpatrika, 7-13 June

हिमाल
खबरपत्रिका

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.

“It’s 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 intervention. Many Nepalis working in the desert heat of the Gulf will also return if they are able to earn up to 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 Bahadur Thapa was in his 20s when he was brought back from college



DAMBAR KRISHNA SHRESTHA

in the US to be Finance Secretary. Similarly, singers and poets were encouraged to return to Nepal from Darjeeling.

As the Maoist insurgency and political instability caused job opportunities to shrink, an increasing number of Nepalis – both educated, skilled or unskilled -- left the country. But the earthquake is an opportunity to create jobs within Nepal as the reconstruction needs are addressed. The government now

needs to come up with right policies and programs to make it attractive for overseas Nepalis to return to work here.

Apart from hundreds of thousands of undocumented seasonal migrant workers in India, more than 3 million Nepalis are now working abroad. The government’s Rs 10 billion reconstruction fund would be used to create jobs in rebuilding the country.

Nepali migrant workers are not

only earning money in the Gulf and Malaysia, but are also learning construction skills. Even those who went to the Gulf as unskilled workers are by now experienced and skilled construction workers. Nearly 70 per cent of Nepal’s migrant population is involved in construction, and their skills can be useful for rebuilding the earthquake-devastated country.

TB Karki of the Non-Resident Nepali Association in Qatar, says

Nepali carpenters, electricians, masons, plumbers, steel fixtures 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 Keshav Acharya thinks it is unfortunate that the government is still devoid of ideas to bring home Nepalis. “This situation is like a musk deer not knowing where its scent gland is,” he says. “Nepalis working abroad are capable of lifting the country from the ruins, and we just need to give them a call.”

Ganesh Gurung, 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 invest their money earned abroad and those who just go abroad to earn money. “The government needs to give them what they want: respect and responsibility, an investment climate and decent salaries,” he says.

“No permanent enemies”

UCPN (Maoist) Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal interviewed by Rabindra Mishra in *BBC Nepali Service*, 8 June

BBC
नेपाली

BBC Nepali Service: The 16-point deal failed to determine names and boundaries of federal provinces, how can you expect a commission to accomplish this task, something 601 members of the Constituent Assembly failed to do?

I think you are biased. The situation is different now. The mistakes we made in the past will not be repeated.

Some members of the 30-party alliance oppose the deal.

I think they have failed to understand the ground reality. 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 stand. It is always an act of give and take. More than 90 per cent of people support the agreement.

Not long ago, your party had dubbed UML Chair KP Oli a ‘retard’? What changed?

Everyone knows there are no permanent friends or permanent enemies in politics.



BBC NEPALI

So, Oli is mentally healthy now?

Why do you interpret the remark literally? That was just symbolic. Besides, we were getting back at Oli for calling us names. If he starts talking positive about us, why would we be negative about him?

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

since we are focusing on the constitution.

Will your party join the new government?

We are for a national unity government. But whether to join the new government will depend on how the NC-UML approach us.

What is 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 directly 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.

But the UCPN (M) is a distant third party, and pressure is building up on you to step down as the party chair.

No, there is no pressure on me to step down. I have led the party for the last 25 years. At times, I felt like doing something different, and shared my thoughts with friends about resigning. 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?

In this political situation, I do not want to become a president. Having written a note of dissent for an executive president, it would not be appropriate.

Will you accept Sushil Koirala as the new president?

I clearly told NC and UML leaders that I was not eying the post of new president. It is up to the NC to decide who will become the new president. If it wants to continue with Ram Baran Yadav, we will have no problems. If it wants Sushil Koirala that is also fine. It was because I clarified that our party did not want the presidentship that the 16-point agreement was possible.

A new mechanism for Nepal

Interview with Vice-Chairman of the National Planning Commission (NPC) Govind Raj Pokhrel in *Kantipur*, 7 June

कान्तिपुर

Kantipur: The government got a lot of flak for being slow with rescue and relief. Will it be the same story for rehabilitation and reconstruction process as well?

Govind Raj Pokhrel: We studied the past disaster scenarios in Nepal as well as of neighbouring countries, and have realised that the traditional methods of rebuilding will not work. We are looking at this as a fresh start rather than just rebuilding and have proposed a new mechanism for the process. In order to build a new and better Nepal we need to concentrate on managing resources, time and empowering the local government authorities. The destruction by the earthquake is much more than expected. 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 but 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 ministries while building the mechanism, we



RSS

will not get as much help as is needed.

Are the donors not willing to donate or is it us who don’t know how to convince them?

Countries all over the world are going through economic recession. Plus the funds are also divided 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 two ways for this: either work with the government or go through budgetary channels. Although not every donor agency will agree, we will have to include everyone. We have to look in 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 until we can make them believe that we have a transparent and efficient system in place for reconstruction. It looks like the donor agencies too want a similar mechanism to the one we are proposing. They want the government and non-government agencies as well as civil society and private organisations to help.

Many are pointing out to the dangers of people living in tents permanently just like in Haiti.

That is exactly why we need to rehabilitate 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, we must help them increase their capacity to farm. Although there are a few places where assistance is required, there are other places where people are queuing up for rice when the maize in their farms is ready to be harvested.

Lastly, how long will it take to rebuild Nepal?

At least five years.

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.”

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

A few houses away is Amrita Majhi (*pictured, below at left*) who 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 five 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 525,000 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, tooth brush, torch light and other essentials to girls and women in shelters in Kathmandu and Bhaktapur.



GOPEN RAI

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 single 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. 🇳🇵



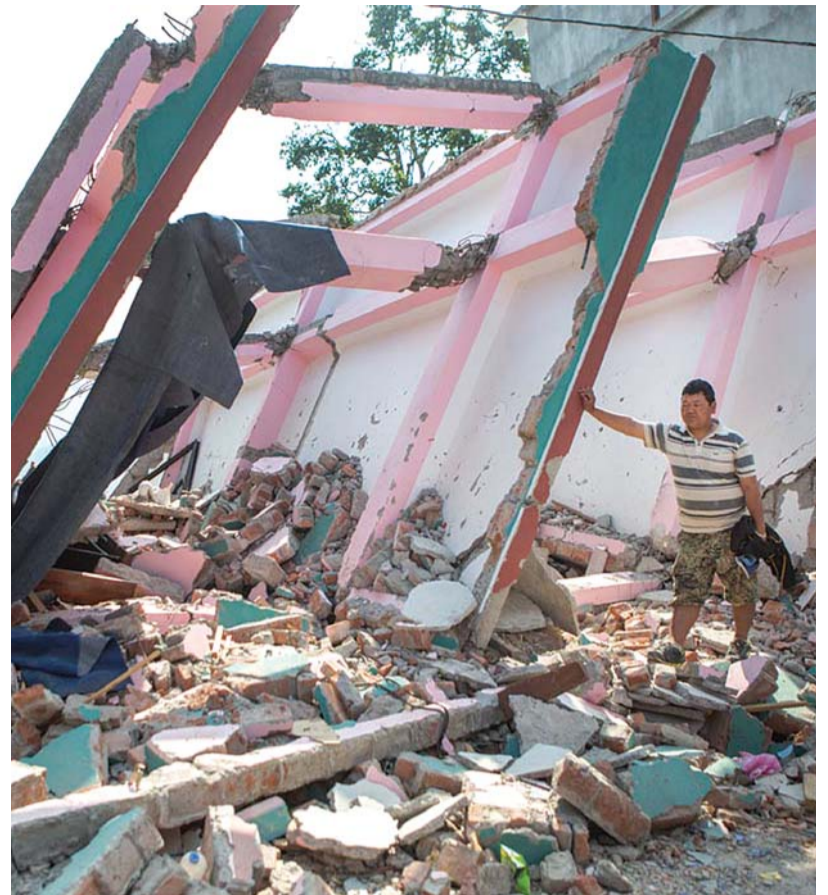
KUNDA DIXIT

Rebuilding

25 April was a foreshock for the



KUNDA DIXIT



JANA AŠENBRENNEROVA

DOMINO EFFECT: Engineers from NSET inspect buildings that came down in Charikot during the 12 May earthquake (*left*).

Many hotels in Charighyang St like these two toppled, but the death toll was low because people were in shelters (*left, below*).

Nima Sherpa says he has no money to demolish what is left of his Hotel Paradise (*above*).

Bir Bahadur Kusali in front of the ruins of his house in Dolakha Bazar. He says: “Everyone is suffering, so I can’t ask people to help me.” (*right*)



JANA AŠENBRENNEROVA

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 dominos.

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 in ruins as well. His family has been living in a tent.

“It is the second earthquake on 12 May that did this,” recalls Sherpa, “the ground was jumping up, it was as if we were being lifted.”

For 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.

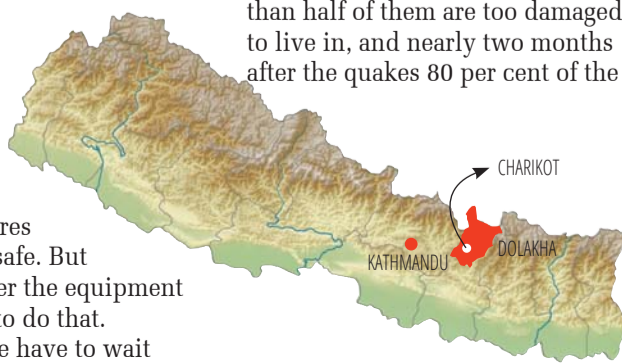
The neighbour, Nabin Shrestha, is also distraught. Like all other buildings on this street, his is uninhabitable. The priority for many urban areas in the 15 quake-affected districts like Charikot now is demolition of damaged concrete structures to make streets safe. But Nepal has neither the equipment 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.”

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 material and we will reconstruct keeping the local style in mind,” says Herman Thapa, who had returned from Switzerland before the quake to manage the resort.

Rebuilding Dolakha is an enormous challenge. The 456MW Upper Tama Kosi project will be delayed by at least a year because landslides which have wiped out the road. Fourteen VDCs need to immediately relocated before the monsoons trigger more rockfalls.

Nearly every government school, health post and hospital in the district has been damaged. More than 95 per cent of the stone and slate homes in western and northern Dolakha have come down.

“We have treated all those injured in the earthquake, now our focus is on maternity cases, and preventing epidemics during the monsoon since most latrines have been destroyed,” says Khageswor Gelal, Dolakha’s District Health Officer. Indeed, most patients being treated in tents at Charikot’s Primary Health Care Centre are pregnancies or have regular ailments.

“The attention on health post-earthquake is helping fulfill our unmet demand for normal medical care,” Gelal says. “The quake has made it possible to turn Charikot’s health centre into a full-fledged hospital.”

While a lot of the attention is rightly on remote villages and roadside settlements that have been completely destroyed by the quake and landslides, the ancient trading town of Dolakha Bazar has been bypassed. Although the Bhimeswor Temple is still standing, nearly every house surrounding it is in ruins.

Bir Bahadur Kusali watches a row of relief trucks raise dust as they travel north to Singati past the ruins of his Dalit neighbourhood. He says: “I lost my home. But at least my family is safe. Everyone is suffering, so I can’t ask people to just help me. We have to pick up the pieces and live on.”

nepalitimes.com

■ Watch video of Nima Sherpa

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

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.



RABINDRA MANANDHAR/NEPAL

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 Daayitwo 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 we 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

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." 🇳🇵

Inside politics

If it took an earthquake to shake up Nepal's deadlocked politics, well, so be it. The four top parties cunningly passed the buck on the name and boundaries of future eight federal units to a future commission and forged the deal. Imperfect as it is, driven by power and greed as it is, the agreement is still a step forward.

DECONSTRUCTION BEFORE RECONSTRUCTION

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