A girl in Barabise of Sindhupalchok swings in a hammock slung under a container truck that serves as her family’s home. Two months after the earthquake, 2 million Nepalis are living in temporary shelters.
A s the date of the international meeting on earthquake assistance to Nepal on 25 June nears, the Nepali media is suddenly festooned with headlines about the transparency, efficacy and even the necessity of international assistance. There are concerns about most post-disaster aid being siphoned off by expensive consultants from donor countries, lack of coordination, the cost of relief flights by the military of various government being counted as part of the humanitarian assistance package, wastage and duplication. A lot of these concerns are valid, and emanate from the disastrous wastage of relief after the 2010 Haiti earthquake, where various evaluations have stated that only 10 per cent of the $16 billion pledged for emergency relief actually ended up in Haiti. There have been shocking revelations of waste by the American Red Cross. Five years after the quake killed 300,000 people, many are still living in tents in Haiti.

“Nepal should not be another Haiti” is the popular refrain from senior government officials. The Finance Ministry’s aid coordination division has accused Nepal’s donors of deliberately bypassing government in disbursing funds and distributing aid. Now, in an effort to take charge, the government is asserting itself and adopting a hard line on how aid in cash and kind can be spent.

Unfortunately, the government has done this in the ham-handed fashion that we have all come to expect of it. Not for better coordination, but for control. Ministries are ham-handed fashion that we have all come to expect of the government is asserting itself and adopting a hard line on how aid in cash and kind can be spent.

A major political party has reached an understanding to promulgate the new constitution by mid-July. This is another blatant lie. They will miss this deadline, you can take my comment to the bank.

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Braving the monsoon
Putting-off federal demarcation will anger some, but the 2 million people without homes have other worries

Even before the April earthquake mutual self-interest among top political leaders were beginning to converge, and there was an effort to finalise the constitution. The earthquake expedited that process, giving both the Maoists and the ruling parties an excuse to compromise without bruising each other’s egos.

If things unfold the way they are expected to, the country will get a constitution by next month by putting federal demarcation in the back burner. It is a recipe for future bickering, but there doesn’t seem to be any other way for now.

Meanwhile, 30km away from Kathmandu in Lamidanda of Kavre, Urmila Adhikari (pic, above) is clearing the debris of her home with bare hands. Every now and then, her seven-year-old son and five-year-old daughter carry bricks to lend a hand, but she shoos them away.

Urmila’s husband is a daily wage earner but his meager earnings do not even buy a loaf of bread for the family, let alone school stationery for the children. While the wife toiled under mid-day sun, man of the house was nowhere to be seen.

Lamidanda residents have not received much relief from outside. Urmila and her neighbours have heard about government’s pledge for Rs 15,000 emergency cash relief but doubt if they will get it before the rains set in.

“I need help to get this rubble cleared soon and rebuild my house. I can’t keep the children under tarpaulin sheets when the storms come,” she said.

The government’s cash distribution program has run into trouble with rising cases of fake applicants (see page 4). Pressure from powerful locals looking to pocket cash compensation for fake houses is so strong that officials in many districts have fled.

For better or for worse, the 16-point agreement is based on nothing but mutual interest of top leaders to secure their own positions. The power sharing deal, which is at the heart of this pact, foresees a government led by the UML’s KP Oli, with the Maoists and the Gachhadar led MJF-Democratic getting key ministerial positions alongside the NC. It also foresees a NC President with yet another Madhesi Vice-President.

However, nothing is as simple as that in Nepal. Unless there is a clear incentive, there is no reason why the NC, being the biggest political party, would want to concede leadership to maintain an alliance whose utility will end the day statute is declared.

KP Oli is forced to trust the NC because Sushil Koirala wants to pass a constitution while in office. Even those angry at Dahal and Gachhadar’s opportunism know that this is the maximum compromise for the present among such a diverse group of stakeholders. So, the right question to ask now is not if this is a good time to be drafting the constitution, but whether it will help the country more ahead. And for survivors like Urmila Adhikari, the concern is only to have enough food for her children and a roof over her head. @Anurag_Acharya

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Friends in need

Plans for disbursement of home rebuilding grants and loans face obstacles

DIWAKAR CHETTRI

Nepal’s authorities coordinating the conference, which aims at securing foreign assistance for rebuilding of the earthquake-devastated country, are desperately waiting for confirmation of participants.

Nepal’s closest neighbours India and China have not yet confirmed who are attending although there are unconfirmed reports that India’s External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj is coming. Nepal is also waiting for the final list of guests from the US, the UK and other European countries.

Early this week, Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat went to New Delhi to officially invite Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on behalf of Prime Minister Sushil Koirala. But Modi is unlikely to attend.

“India has not confirmed anyone’s name as yet,” said Narayan Dhakal, Nepal’s vice chairman of the NPC. “I am waiting for confirmation letter from China.”


But only 13 donors have confirmed their participation in the meeting to be co-hosted by Japan.

Norway’s Foreign Minister Borge Brende, Japan’s State Minister of Foreign Affairs Yasuhide Nakayama, Sri Lanka’s Disaster Management Minister A. Abdul Hamid Mohamed Fowzie and Bhutan’s Finance Minister Namgyal Dorji have been confirmed.

The World Bank’s Vice President for the East Asia and the Pacific Axel van Troetsenburg, European Union’s Development Commissioner JCHR’s President Akihiko Tanaka, ADB President Takehiko Nakao and UN’s Under Secretary General Jan Egeland have also confirmed their participation. UN General Secretary Ban Ki-moon will not attend but will send a video message urging the world to help rebuild Nepal.

With only a week left for the 25 June donor meeting, Nepal’s authorities are coordinating the conference, which aims at securing foreign assistance for rebuilding of the earthquake-devastated country, are desperately waiting for confirmation of participants.

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How not to reinvent the wheel
Donor funding should not just go for reconstruction, but also help build capacity

By taking it so seriously, the government is going all out to convince donors to overcome their misgivings about the lack of accountability and governance, and open their purse strings. It has put a target of Rs 6 trillion for earthquake rehabilitation.

As the ongoing relief work has once again shown, making resources available is only part of the story. Getting it quickly and efficiently to the neediest beneficiaries is the bigger, and often unmet challenge. Relief supplies have been derailed, hijacked by the national and local political cadres. Even some well-meaning NGOs didn’t really care where the supplies went as long as they had their handover photo-ops.

The Rs 15,000 immediate relief for families whose houses were destroyed is also being sidetracked by the not-so-needy, and the number of houses in certain VDCs has exceeded the total number before the earthquake. Political goons are threatening and forcing VDC secretaries to certify themselves as victims many times over. Despite a quarter of a century of democratic institution-building, there is still no accountability and nothing to protect us from local political tyrants.

In a column titled ‘Follow the people’ in this space two weeks ago, I drew attention to the exemplary work done by forestry user groups and Female Community Health Volunteers in Nepal – a feat made possible through concerted support of many donors coordinated by the Nepali government. It proves that building national capacity for managing development and relief work is vital, and a part what is discussed at the donor meeting. There is no point reinventing the wheel.

We now know that money alone does not make rehabilitation work. In fact, by itself it is more of a nuisance and distorts and worsens the power relations between local ‘high caste’ feudal elites and their poorer ‘low caste’ neighbours by widening the income gap. In fact this is why Nepal has remained desperately poor and underdeveloped despite 25 years of ‘representative democracy’.

Survivors of the quake have once again brought into focus the real face of Nepal’s widespread and chronic poverty. Most of the 700,000 houses that came down with the quake were those built of stones, brick and mud mortar. That was what the poor could afford. Earthquake rebuilding and rehabilitation must therefore acquire a wider scope and include rebuilding economies as well. This would call for a longer term understanding that goes far beyond one-time pledging and grant of big money as the government seems to optimistically expect.

Plainly put, the donors for the earthquake rebuilding must first realise that their accountability is much more, if not exclusively, towards survivors of the earthquake and not the political and bureaucratic bosses who pretend to represent them. The people already know very well that the so-called ‘national unity government’ is going to be a mechanism for a share in the earthquake rebuilding pie for all politicians.

Without concomitant institutional innovation and capacity building at the grassroots, earthquake rebuilding funds too are going to evaporate in transit as it has in the long sordid history of foreign aid in Nepal. Donor agencies, particularly the big ones, must prevail upon the government to:

1. Institute an apolitical leadership for earthquake rebuilding, possibly by the President himself, like the way it was done in the Pakistan earthquake of 2005.
2. Form a professional agency to work out a program of action, including an institutional mechanism for effective quake rebuilding.
3. Install an apolitical mechanism, perhaps involving the security forces, to backstop the quake-affected communities at the grassroots.
4. Create a network of quake survivor groups at the grassroots to manage their own reconstruction and rehabilitation.

A head of a major donor was scheduled for 25 June in Kathmandu, Nepal and its international partners need to seriously think about what kind of help would be most cost-effective and sustainable.

GUEST COLUMN
Bihari K Shrestha

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The Gurkhas at Gallipoli

On 24 May, a truce was agreed. Hunter Weston was promoted to lieutenant general and made a corps commander. His VIII Corps consisted of the long-suffering 29th Division, the RND, the 42nd Division and the 29th Indian Infantry Brigade. As for the Gurkhas, by the end of May, all of the original company commanders of the 1st/6th, Gurkhas had been killed or wounded, and even the other two battalions which had hardly been engaged as yet had also suffered losses. By this time, the two battles of Krithia had been fought to no avail, so that the beach-head remained pitifully small. As on the Western Front, gains were counted in yards and only under the protection of the overhanging cliffs could the Allied troops keep respite from enemy fire and, to some extent at least, from the heat. For as the summer advanced, the weather became hotter and the major concern became the temperature and the flies, and the putrid, unburied dead. Dysentery spread rapidly and claimed victims by the score, while lice added to the discomfort of the soldiers.

On 2 June 1915, the 1st/5th and 2nd/10th Gurkha Rifles arrived to replace the two withdrawn and re-deployed Punjabi battalions of the Indian Brigade. What would come to be known as the Third Battle of Krithia was planned for 4 June, and the new arrivals were soon in action. The objective was the capture of Arch Baba, a feature some 200m high, which commanded both the Helles beach-head and the Narrows. After two barrages from the Allied guns directed at the Ottoman defences with a view to destroying any barbed-wire entanglements, the 1st/6th Gurkhas and 14th Sikhs of the Indian Brigade, together with the Lancashire Fusiliers, went forward at noon, advancing on the extreme left along Gully Spur, with the 29th and 42nd Divisions in the centre, the RND on the right centre, and the French on the right. The Allies had about 30,000 men and the enemy had up to 28,000, half of them in the front line. The French attack failed quickly, three battalions of the RND went forward, but the fourth, the Collingwood Brigade, which had seen no fighting since the beginning of the war, was withered out in less than 30 minutes and the other three battalions took ‘frightful casualties and lost all but ten of their officers’. The Manchester Brigade of the 42nd Division advanced strongly as did the 29th Division on their left, but eventually, the Manchesters were maneuvered and forced to retreat. Along Gully Ravine, on the left again, the Indian Brigade was hard hit. One Gurkha battalion lost 23, another 32, and the other two lost all of its British soldiers. The 14th Sikhs, one of the few non-Gurkha pure class battalions of the Indian Army, composed of seasoned Jat Sikhs soldiers from Punjab, launched repeated attacks in the face of murderous gunfire against the Ottoman positions astride Gully Ravine. One section managed to penetrate the barbed wire and to change the enemy with their bayonets. But the cost was devastating: on that one day, the unit’s casualties amounted to 82 per cent of those engaged in the battle. The Sikhs lost 380 men out of 514. Only three of their British officers were left alive and unwounded.

Writing to the Commander in Chief in India a few weeks after the event, Hamilton paid tribute to the heroism of these men:

In the highest sense of the word, extreme gallantry has been shown by this fine Battalion … in spite of these tremendous losses there was not a sign of wavering all day. Not an inch of ground gained was given up and not a single straggler came back. The ends of the enemy’s trenches leading into the Ravine were found to be blocked with the bodies of Sikhs and of the enemy who died fighting at close quarters, and the glacis slope is thickly dotted with the bodies of these fine soldiers all lying on their faces as they fell in their steady advance on the enemy. The history of the Sikhs affords many instances of their valor as soldiers, but it may be safely asserted that nothing finer than the grim valour and steady discipline displayed by them on the 6th June has ever been done by soldiers of the Khalsa. Their devotion to duty and their splendid loyalty to their orders and to their leaders makes a record their nation should look back upon with pride for many generations.

Later in the day, the 1st/5th Gurkhas were called forward in an attempt to seize success where others had not. The battalion was ordered to follow the same route as G Company of the 1st/6th, but the enemy was now prepared for them. Checked by the barbed wire, which had not been destroyed by the Navy’s artillery, they were prime targets for the Ottoman rifles and machine-guns. The attack petered out with heavy losses: 129 Gurkhas fell, as did seven of their British officers. Despite these heavy losses, the 1st/5th kept on attacking, but were decimated.

One last gallant attempt was made by No 1 Company under Major M H W Nightingale, who was later awarded the DSO for exceptional gallantry in leading an attack on a strongly defended spur after he had been wounded.

He reached the crest and was again wounded but coming back a few yards he rallied his men and again led them on. He was wounded a third time but still endeavoured to advance until he fainted.

At dusk, the 1st/5th Gurkhas was ordered to withdraw, the odds had been too great. Retreat was inevitable. Hunter Watsons’ corps had registered 4,500 casualties, about a quarter of the troops he had sent forward. The French losses were about 200 and the Turks had lost at least 9,000. It was in the course of this battle, according to Farwell, that Naik Dhan Singh Gurung was captured, but escaped. He was being marched away into captivity when he bolted and threw himself over a cliff. He survived his fall but was again captured, this time on the beach. Again, he escaped, on this occasion by diving into the sea. Few Gurkhas could swim, but Dhan Singh was an exception. In spite of the hail of bullets that pursued him, he managed to make his way, still in all his clothes (even his boots), out to sea and to swim ashore to the shore until at last he could land safely behind the Allied lines.

Part 3, June 1915
This is the third part of a series of articles on the Gurkhas at Gallipoli, drawn from what will prove to be a book on Nepal, The Gurkhas and the Great War by David Seddon.

On 14 May, the 89th Punjabis and 89th Punjabis were withdrawn from the conflict and embarked for France. This was said to be because they contained a significant proportion of Muslim troops and could not be relied upon not to mutiny in sympathy with the Ottoman army.

In the short time they had been on the peninsula, the 89th Punjabis had suffered over 100 casualties, while the 69th Punjabis, which had not been engaged in the front line, had nevertheless lost 18 and 23 were wounded. These units were replaced, although not until 2 June, by the 1/5th and 2/10th Gurka Rifles from Nepal.

For a week or so, the ANZAC sector had been relatively quiet. Even so, casualties in the Cape Helles sector had mounted. The attacking forces and the enemy were both in trench, which in the case of the former stretched from short to shore, raids and patrols were regularly conducted with increasing intensity.

On 19 May, the enemy made a night attack on the ANZAC forces. Four divisions of up to 40,000 men descended from the heights above the beaches to crash the ANZACs. But the attack went horribly wrong and the intended victims were able to destroy the oncoming Ottoman forces which suffered heavy casualties with some 10,000 killed or injured.

The next day, when they came out under a white flag to collect their dead and wounded, the Allied troops were willing to help and even give the wounded and prisoners cigarettes and chocolates. Charles Bean, a

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Gallipoli, drawn from what will prove to be a book on Nepal, The Gurkhas and the Great War by David Seddon.
Contrary to predictions, the monsoon was not late, but early. And it didn’t start with a bang, but with a whimper. It is unmistakably the southwest monsoon because the wind is from the east, and the pattern of sunny, humid days with night rain is characteristically monsoony. Fingers crossed that it will gather strength, and the good news is that a large trough is now moving up the Andhra Pradesh coast.

FAQ: Why does the southwest monsoon come from the east?
Answer: Because after being pushed from the Arabian Sea across India and the Bay of Bengal, the topography of the eastern Himalaya forces the monsoon to curl eastwards over northeastern India.

Trekking guide Ganesh Adhikari was on an eight-day trek in the Annapurna region when the second earthquake struck on 12 May. Adhikari saw only 35 other trekkers on the route that week. That number would have been in the hundreds in any other spring season.

Even though a majority of the trekking trails weren’t affected by the quakes, negative coverage in media, fear of the occurrence of another bigger shake, have kept trekkers at bay.

Nava Raj Pandey of the Thamel-based Motherland Nepal Trekking and Expeditions says his company, along with other trekking agencies, is now working to spread information about safe trekking routes to potential visitors.

"There are a lot of places that didn’t suffer any damage in the quake, and we want tourists to know this. It’s not only for business, but it’s the truth," says Pandey.

Trekking agents are ready to book trips to the Annapurna region and Everest Base Camp where lodges are open and guides can be easily hired. Because the entire circuit has very little traffic, entrepreneurs say it is a perfect time for those who prefer trekking in isolation.

The area is also not as susceptible to mudslides as other treks that must be closed down during the monsoon. Mustang, which lies in the rain shadow of the Himalaya, is another destination tourism entrepreneurs are promoting for monsoon visitors.

However, trekking agents say unlike tourism entrepreneurs in Pokhara which last month announced huge discounts on hotels and tour packages, slashing off rates is not a viable option to attract tourists.

"The cost of organising treks has gone up and as it is we keep very minimal margin," says Prem Shrestha of Eco Trek. Transporting food and other goods from the city to trekking areas have gone up due to damaged roads.

This slump in business has been difficult for many guides and porters who depend on the seasonal job for their yearly income. Many of them are beginning to look elsewhere for work, and some are being hired for relief delivery by the World Food Programme (see page 14-15).

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Mingma Sherpa from Dolakha has been working as a guide for 13 years. He went to work in South Korea and was earning more there but returned because he wanted to be with his family.

Sherpa says he has no option but to once again go abroad. He hasn’t been hired for any treks this season. Sherpa taught himself a few languages for his job as a guide, and is now learning Japanese not because he expects any prospective Japanese tourists, but because he is trying to go to Japan if he finds a job there.

"I will have to pay brokers at least $12,000 to obtain a work visa," he says, dejected. Even if he gets to go it will be a long time before Sherpa can send money home.

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As a child I was told dogs were filthy animals, they carried diseases and to stay away from them. I was never taught to love and respect dogs. Hence, I never really understood why we celebrated Kukur puja. After joining the army, I became a dog trainer. I have been with OT for nine years now, gave him basic training and then special training for search and rescue. I see so many qualities in OT that I wish were present in human beings. He is so pure, just look at him. I try to emulate him but am not sure how successful I have been.

Dipak Paudel
Thimi, Bhaktapur

The earthquake destroyed my house so I went to the market to buy hammer and nails to fix it up. I also bought this nice bag while I was there.

Jyurme Lama
Melamchi, Sindhupalchok

They call me mad but I am not. My parents died when I was really young. My relatives who raised me are also no longer alive. I have no family, friends, house, food or companion. Many times I have been beaten for no fault of mine. People pelt stones at me and children run away when they see me. They have no idea the rag I have on my head is to protect it from the wind which gives me a splitting headache. But once in awhile someone comes and talks to me.

Gyan Bahadur Dagar
Gamtha, Mugu

It started with a post about a young tea-seller, followed by a story on a neighbourhood barber, next to go up was a doughnut maker’s tale. Since then photographer Jaydev Paudel (pic, inset) has shared hundreds of stories about everyday Nepalis on his Stories of Nepal page, fashioned after the very popular Humans of New York. Paudel’s stories struck a chord with Nepalis on Facebook and the page currently has over 129,000 likes.

“I had no idea Stories of Nepal was going to be such a hit, it was just a project to understand fellow Nepalis,” said Paudel, who moonlights as a graphic designer.

After the 25 April earthquake the 35-year-old set out in search of more stories. He was shocked by the destruction, but more impressed by the strength of survivors: such as this of a new-born earthquake baby in Kavre (right).

People offered to help, and Stories of Nepal took relief materials to 280 families and built 50 shelters in the quake-hit districts.

Says Paudel: “I had never before witnessed such love and compassion as I did in days after the quake.”

storiesofnepal.com
@storiesofNepal

As a child I was told dogs were filthy animals, they carried diseases and to stay away from them. I was never taught to love and respect dogs. Hence, I never really understood why we celebrated Kukur puja. After joining the army, I became a dog trainer. I have been with OT for nine years now, gave him basic training and then special training for search and rescue. I see so many qualities in OT that I wish were present in human beings. He is so pure, just look at him. I try to emulate him but am not sure how successful I have been.

Dipak Paudel
Thimi, Bhaktapur

They call me mad but I am not. My parents died when I was really young. My relatives who raised me are also no longer alive. I have no family, friends, house, food or companion. Many times I have been beaten for no fault of mine. People pelt stones at me and children run away when they see me. They have no idea the rag I have on my head is to protect it from the wind which gives me a splitting headache. But once in awhile someone comes and talks to me.
In the end we are all Nepalis. We all die when suffocated, and bleed when cut. The earthquake didn’t discriminate people on the basis of religion, caste, and class. Who are we then to set apart people when nature doesn’t.

Janga Bahadur Majhi
Manthali, Ramechap

I worked in a poultry farm in Qatar for five years. My employer was a good man, he often commended me for my hardwork and praised me in front of his family and friends. The day I was leaving for Nepal he gave me Rs 100,000 saying it was a gift from his family to mine. I returned home and built a house for my family and one for my brothers with the money I saved. My children were going to school, crops were growing well, things were falling in place when the earthquake struck and I lost everything. A few days after the quake, my former employer called me on my phone. He said he had seen the news on tv and told me: ‘You are like my brother, tell me what you need. Come back if you need a job, I will send you a ticket.’

Thapa Dai
Ghumthang, Sindhupalchok

I was very handsome when I was young. The girls would start whispering to each other the minute they saw me. I think I still am. I am one of the few men in this village to elope with a girl. My family didn’t have enough money for an arranged marriage so I thought I’d just take her away with me. In those days love was very different. We were shy and communication was a lot harder. The youngsters these days have mobile phones so they fall in love over the phones. In our times love happened in person.

Bahadur Shrestha
Ghumthang, Sindhupalchok

After a while even the tears run dry. I thought there was no point in sitting and crying anymore. So I picked up these tomatoes from our garden and started selling them to passers-by on the highway. If I can earn even a little amount, I will be able to buy rice and spices on my own.

Mina Tamang
Gyimol, Kavre

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SONIA AWALE
IN DOLAKHA

A Mickey Mouse and a flower painted on shattered pillars are a reminder of happier times here at the Raj Kalenivier School in Dolakha Bazaar. A wooden staircase leading to the second floor is dangling precariously – there is no second floor. Desks and benches are crushed and scattered. The gate is the only structure still standing in a school with 250 students (pic, below).

All 363 schools and 1,200 classrooms in Dolakha district were brought down in the 25 April earthquake and the 12 May aftershock. Many students would have been killed if the earthquake had struck on a weekday, or if children had gone back to school when the aftershock came.

“Schools in northern Dolakha are the worst affected, and although we have put up temporary learning centres they are very vulnerable to landslides because the rains have started,” said Dolakha’s Assistant District Education Officer Madhav Sharma. “We are now working to make the temporary classrooms sturdier.”

Across the 15 most-affected districts, 30,145 classrooms were completely destroyed and most of these were in government schools. The earthquake killed 618 students and 45 teachers, and an estimated 1.5 million students were affected.

It has been two weeks since the schools reopened, and most of them conducted extracurricular activities to put students at ease. Even teachers needed psychosocial counseling, and 416 teachers in Dolakha were trained in post-disaster instruction in classrooms.

As in Dolakha, many schools in Kathmandu Valley also served as shelters for families fleeing their unsafe homes. Adarsha Kanya School in Patan housed more than 500 people for a month after the quake.

Teacher Muna Kharel said, “We were trained to make students get over their fears and we have a few students who lost their family members who couldn’t even speak in the first few days, but now with counseling they are starting to cope and move on.”

Uniformed students in temporary bamboo and thatch classrooms seemed engaged in class activity and engrossed in chatting with friends after more than a month’s long break. Many, however, are still afraid of aftershocks. Ninth grader Srijana Senchuri lost her grandfather in the earthquake, and told us she can’t really focus on her studies. “My favorite subject is math but these days whenever I try to study or concentrate I fear that there will be another shaking,” she said, “what if that happens again?”

Across town at the Madan Memorial School, primary teacher Rita Dalal’s 18-year-old son jumped off the second floor window when the earthquake struck and broke his leg. Dalal said she didn’t just have to counsel her class, but also her son. “Even I panic,” Dalal admitted. “I was the first to run out of the room while I was attending a training in psychosocial counseling, I was so embarrassed.”

Parents and guardians seem reassured that classrooms are being held in the open. Anshu Ayer, 37, a guardian in Madan Memorial School said she was initially fearful about sending her children to school, but was relieved that the classrooms were in bamboo sheds. She said: “It is much safer than my house anyway.”

Madan Memorial principal Govinda Paudel told us that despite all the preparation, school attendance has been only 60 per cent. He is hoping that once the aftershocks cease and families return from home districts, it will gradually increase.

The earthquake is a chance not just to retrofit school buildings and to construct seismic-resistant schools, but also to reform and revamp Nepal’s ailing education system.
Madan Memorial agrees that schools can always be rebuilt, but it is the corrupt and mismanaged education system that needs to be reconstructed. “We can’t blame the earthquake, that wasn’t our fault, but we were already doing things wrong and need to correct them,” Karki said.

Meanwhile in Dolakha, the task of rebuilding classrooms will not begin till after the monsoon. For the moment, schools are just trying to survive day-to-day and get things as much back to normal as possible.

“All of our schools are damaged, the tents are leaking in the rain, but at least classes are being held,” said Chiranjivi Maskey of the Federation of Nepalese Journalists in Dolakha.

But for the long term we need help to rebuild schools not just in Dolakha but in all the 15 districts.”

**SAVAYUN THUNGA**: Children in Barabise of Sindhupalchok sing the national anthem and attend class in a tent after their school building was destroyed in the 25 April earthquake.

"The disaster was a catharsis that can help us end the political deadlock so Nepal is governed better, we right the wrongs, and ensure no one is left out. The constitution is already on fast track, let’s hope it will be appropriate for Nepal and well implemented."

The upcoming donor meeting in Kathmandu is the perfect opportunity to communicate to Nepal’s international partners our determination to rebuild a better Nepal. The National Planning Commission has taken the lead in spearheading outside support, and it is important that we have the right strategy for reconstruction and rehabilitation, and more importantly, that we can convince the international community that we are capable of implementing it equitably, efficiently and with a sense of urgency. Let’s present ourselves with dignity and unity and not as beggars.

It is also important that we convince them that we can accommodate those who genuinely want to come and help. Unfortunately, the message going out is that we don’t need any more help. Reconstruction after the earthquake needs strong leadership and ownership of the process, not control over aid flows.

We are turning away many who are willing to help. Like Ann, a 60-year-old Londoner who wants to donate $20,000 to Nepal’s earthquake survivors. She doesn’t want to give it to organisations with large overheads or the government, but to the neediest directly. There is tremendous goodwill for Nepal and its earthquake survivors. She doesn’t want to give it to organisations with large overheads or the government, but to the neediest directly. There is tremendous goodwill for Nepal and its earthquake survivors.

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**Guest Column**

**Sanduk Ruit**

The state, by definition, is the most important player. It needs to be accommodating, have a long-term vision and a clear understanding of just how important this particular moment is in the history of Nepal.

This is a time of opportunity, a blessing in disguise. It has opened and connected Nepal to the outside world more than ever before. We have been involved in eye care in Nepal, and we can be proud of what we have achieved at the Tilganga Institute of Ophthalmology over the last three decades. It was built because of teamwork between dedicated Nepalis and catalytic support from outside.

It must be said that it was also possible because we were allowed to work independently with minimal political interference. Hospitals like ours provide a blueprint for affordable and accessible healthcare that do not compromise on the quality of service. Patients who can afford the service pay for it, and those who can’t pay a minimum or no fee at all.

There is no reason why this sustainable and viable model can’t be scaled up to the national level so that no Nepali has to die for lack of medical treatment. All it needs is the political will, and this is the time to muster it.

One of the most positive trends to emerge in the post-earthquake relief has been the eagerness of the youth to volunteer to help fellow Nepalis in distress. This is a tremendous source of energy that the government can tap for nation-rebuilding, instead of politicising the young. I salute the youth who are the future of Nepal and I hope they can keep their unpolished enthusiasm alive.

Nepal has now achieved high school enrollment rates, and female literacy has doubled in the past 15 years. We must use the opportunity of reconstructing the 5,000 destroyed schools to also revamp the education system so it meets modern requirements and nurtures concerned citizens. The key here is retention of motivated teachers in rural schools by paying them more. It is not just classrooms that need retrofitting, the school curricula also need to be retrofitted. Poverty can be alleviated at the grassroots level by addressing employment and education.

In community after community, I have seen women removing debris and piling bricks from what used to be their homes. The men were nowhere in sight, having long left to work in the Gulf or Malaysia. The quake has added additional burden and responsibility on the women, but it also allowed them to take charge. Our job should be to empower them, assist the women-run households with subsidies for reconstruction and ease their hardship.

Let’s unite and rise to build a real, new Nepal above all individual and political differences.

Sanduk Ruit is the award-winning founder of the Tilganga Institute of Ophthalmology and the Himalayan Cataract Project.
Amercian cinema is ubiquitous with films about sports. In fact sports movies are pretty much a genre in themselves, and, to be perfectly honest, of all the feel-good genres, this one is my favourite. Mainly because, the good ones, like the Blindside (2009) and Moneyball (2011) in addition to being ridiculously uplifting are usually based on real life stories and therefore can be extrapolated as fairly effective teaching tools for people of all ages and inclinations. It is surprising how people who hate sports tend to enjoy movies on the subject.

McFarland, USA is as standard a sport film as it gets. A down on his luck, frustrated football coach, Jim White (played by Kevin Costner) is forced to move to McFarland in California, one of the poorest towns in the state, with a predominantly Mexican American demographic. As an assistant football coach under an already entrenched, inept bully of a man, White visibly falters, wondering how he can pursue the vocation he loves in such a place and also provide for his wife and two daughters.

It is only when White discovers that most of his students can run pretty darn fast that he conceives the idea of training them to run cross country, to compete in the state championships – a sport he has no previous experience in coaching.

I will not ruin this little gem of a film by elaborating on what follows, just suffice to say that it really will warm your heart. Even while it is formulaic, McFarland, USA succeeds mainly because the screenwriters have been smart enough not to downplay the conflict inherent in the ethnic disparities that arise with White being well, white, and having to train young people who, in addition to coming from a totally different socio-economic background, also have an entirely different culture rooted in their Mexican origins.

Kevin Costner, who has always excelled at playing the everyman is perfectly cast as a quiet, stoic, but wryly humourous coach and father figure. While the wonderful Maria Bello is wasted a little in her role, as Cheryl, his pithy blonde, outspoken wife, the young men in the cross country team, are exceedingly well cast, proving that a decent script and stellar casting can raise a film beyond the ordinary; making the mundane memorable.

McFarland, USA produced and distributed by Disney, even while being of the glossier kind of American cinema, is one that we could do with more of. It does not shy away from class, race, and the hard realities of American life, presenting a complete picture.
Devika Khargti Magar in Hilmal Khagpati, 14-20 June

Shanta Chaudhary never went to school because she was forced to become a Kamlari (girl-child indentured labourer) at the age of eight. After being freed, she became an activist, working for the rights of landless farmers and to abolish Kamlari culture.

When the CPN (UML) chose her as a member of the first Constituent Assembly (CA) under the Proportional Representation Constituent Assembly (CA) under the Proportional Representation system in 2008, many were surprised to see an uneducated former bonded labourer in the parliament.

Chaudhary who chaired the Parliamentary Committee on Natural Resources and Means was often ridiculed by other members for being illiterate.

“I felt humiliated,” she recalls. “Had my parents been able to send me to school, I would not have faced such abuses.”

Chaudhary then enrolled herself in a six-month adult literacy class, where she learnt to read and write. At the first parliamentary committee meeting, Chaudhary took more than five minutes to write her name. Other lawmakers watched as she wrote her name with great difficulty.

Last month she enrolled in Grade 8 of Danda Gaun Higher Secondary School near her hometown in Dang.

“I didn’t have time and money to go to school when I was a child,” she says. “I now have both so I am making use of the opportunity.”

Chaudhary’s two children, a son and a daughter are also studying in the same school. Her son is in Grade 9 and daughter in Grade 8.

First Chaudhary says her children were embarrassed to be going to school with their mother, even the teachers laughed at her, but after seeing how determined she was, they have all grown supportive.

Chaudhary wanted to join school last year but she was diagnosed with uterine cancer, and has been undergoing treatment. In 2013 Chaudhary published a much-acclaimed autobiography about her journey from being a child slave to a Constituent Assembly member.

Madhesi disarray
Kamrup, 18 June

The Madhesi Front was always marred by distrust, and never a firm alliance. After four major parties inked a 16-point constitution deal on the constitution and a national government, the front has fractured like never before. And every member party is trying to seize the deal for its own benefit.

Bijaya Gachhadar, one of the key members of the front, not only signed the deal but also brokered it. Other Madhesi parties led by Raj Kumar Yadav, Anil Jha, Sharad Singh Bhandari and Mahendra Ray have criticized the agreement. But they are unlikely to reject it, and want to benefit from the 40 per cent seats allocated for Proportional Representation (PR).

Upendra Yadav teamed up with Ashok Rai and announced another alliance: Federal Socialist Forum Nepal. Yadav and Rai both have rejected the deal, but the united party seems more interested in post-constitution politics and opportunities. The front’s leader Kamal Thapa is alone against the compromise but has no support from other leaders. Mahesh Thakur and some youth leaders are planning an agitations, but look confused over where to start.

Rohingya in Kathmandu
Pradip Banjag in Kasp, 14-20 June

After crossing over into Bangladesh on a boat from Burma, 28-year-old Amin Hussain and his family came to Kathmandu via India in 2012.

Hussain and his family are among thousands of Rohingya who fled Burma after anti-Muslim attacks in parts of the western Rakhine state. The plight of Rohingya ‘boat people’ is making headlines in Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia.

Before the riots erupted three years ago, Myanmar government jobs, or to apply for basic services. Bangladesh. As a result, they were not eligible for refugee certificate from the UNHCR.

It took Amin more than a year to reunite with his family in Bangladesh. Amin learned of his wife and children’s whereabouts. However it took him more than a year to reunite with his family in Bangladesh.

My wife was pregnant when I lost her, she was brave enough to deliver the baby and bring them to Bangladesh on her own,” he says. “In Kathmandu we face a lot of problems but at least we do not have to fear for our lives.”

But the real tragedy for the Rohingya began in 2012 as Burma embarked on the path to democracy, and the persecution by the majority Buddhists is driving the Rohingya refugee crisis.

Carrot: 16-point agreement
Su Dinesh, 14-20 June

Nepali Times

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Not since the conflict ended in 2006 have the locals of Alu Khaiveni in Gorkha seen as much helicopter activity as in the past two months. An abandoned rubber factory has been turned into a forward base for emergency flights to the mountains.

Many parts of Nepal are hard to reach at the best of times, but after the 25 April earthquake, terrain and weather have become the most challenging obstacles to get urgent relief to remote communities in the 15 mountain districts before the monsoon sets in.

Roads that had been damaged and recently repaired are blocked again by landslides. Helicopters are often grounded due to cloud cover in the high valleys. And now that military aircraft from India, China and the US have gone back, there is also a shortage of helicopters to clear the backlog of some 350 tons of relief material.

The UN’s World Food Programme (WFP), which specialises in food deliveries in emergencies around the world, is managing the logistics of taking tents, roofing material, food, medicines and basic supplies to far-flung villages in Delakha, Sindulpalchok, Rasuwa, Nuwakot and Dhading districts.

“In Nepal, we are working in some of the most difficult terrains in the world, and the challenge will be compounded by the monsoon,” said Richard Ragan, who WFP brought in from his posting in Tanzania because of his familiarity with Nepal’s mountains while serving as the WFP Nepal representative for four years till 2009.

WFP doesn’t just transport its own food aid, but also coordinates with the district administration to lift relief material collected by nearly 100 partners to village areas without road access. It has three Remote Operations Bases in Chautara of Sindulpalchok, Deurali of Gorkha and Charikot of Dolakha where relief material are trucked in to be loaded onto helicopters.

WFP has hired a fleet of five Mi8s and smaller helicopters, and is also employing hundreds of trekking porters, mountaineers and mule trains to repair trails and get to even more remote areas which will be difficult to reach during the monsoon.

The work has been divided into three phases. Immediately after the quake, WFP said it reached 2 million people in the affected areas with 10kg of rice each for families of five. In the second phase, it is working with local government to distribute rice, dal and cooking oil to last three weeks for 1.2 million people. In the last phase, it will be reaching 900,000 people with cash for work in hardest-hit districts for debris clearance and reconstruction.

Since long sections of foot roads that had been damaged and recently repaired are blocked again by landslides. Helicopters are often grounded due to cloud cover in the high valleys. And now that military aircraft from India, China and the US have gone back, there is also a shortage of helicopters to clear the backlog of some 350 tons of relief material.

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The 8th summit

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fter seven Nepali women got to the top of Mt Everest in 2008 and finished climbing the seven highest peaks in seven continents last year, they thought they had run out of challenges.

But when Nepal was hit by an earthquake on 25 April, members of The Seven Summits Women’s Team immediately put their knowledge of mountains and experience in managing logistics in remote areas to good use for relief and rehabilitation work.

Asha Kumari Singh is from Mahottari district in the plains, but knows Rasuwa district intimately ever since she spent two months here in 2007 for a mountaineering training course on Langtang Glacier. So, when the UN’s World Food Programme (WFP) asked if she would like to be a field officer in Rasuwa for relief distribution, she readily agreed.

“I may be from the Tarai, but I am at home here and have many friends,” Singh said after returning from delivering food and roofing sheets to the devastated village of Gatlang on Monday. “But my parents are more worried about my safety now, than when I was climbing Mt Everest,” she laughed.

Another mountaineer from the team, Chunu Shrestha, is based at WFP’s Remote Operations Base in Charikot where she helps assess the need in remote villages of Sindulpalchok so supplies can be dispatched by helicopter, road or porters.

“It is not just about loading a helicopter and sending it off,” Shrestha told us in Charikot on Saturday, “you have to know the specific need in every village. Some villages are disappointed when you bring them sanitation kits, they want food. Others don’t need food, they want tin roofs.”

Other team members Shalee Banerji and Maya

WORKING OUT OF HOME: The WFP’s Richard Ragan and member of the Seven Summits Women’s Team, Chunu Shrestha, at the Remote Operations Base warehouse in Charikot on Saturday above. Other team members Shailee Basnet and Maya Shrestha, is based at WFP’s Remote Operations Base in Charikot where she helps assess the need in remote villages of Sindulpalchok so supplies can be dispatched by helicopter, road or porters.

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Other team members Shalee Banerji and Maya
HEAVY LIFT: An MI8 is loaded with three tons of tin sheets (overleaf) at WFP’s base in Dursik (above left) for delivery to northern Gorkha before the monsoon sets in. Villagers in Philim of Upper Gorkha watch roofing material being unloaded (below, far left). WFP staff help unload the tin sheets (far left). The village of Uhiya near the 25 April epicenter clings precariously to a slope caused by landslides (above, left).

Villagers in Philim of Upper Gorkha watch roofing material being unloaded (below, far left). WFP staff help unload the tin sheets (left). The village of Uhiya near the 25 April epicenter clings precariously to a slope caused by landslides (above, left).

trails along the Budi Gandagi have been wiped out by huge landslides, the Trekking Agents Association of Nepal (TAAN) and the Nepal Mountaineering Association (NMA) are readying porters and mule trains to carry supplies across the 5,100m Larkya Pass to Prok and Bihi in Upper Gorkha and Ripchet and Chhokamar in the Tsum Valley. Trails will also be repaired in Sindulpulchok, Rasuwa, Dhading and Dolakha so locally-hired porters can pre-position supplies. “We have become smarter about this, and have brought in people who know the mountains: Nepalis and foreign climbers, trekking porters and locals to create jobs while helping with relief and rehabilitation,” Ragan said as he helped unload three tons of corrugated sheets off a MI8 in Philim of Upper Gorkha.

WFP has got some members of the Seven Summits Women’s Team to help out with logistics in the districts (see box).

Nepalis and foreign climbers, trekking porters and locals to create jobs while helping with relief and rehabilitation,” Ragan said as he helped unload three tons of corrugated sheets off a MI8 in Philim of Upper Gorkha. WFP has got some members of the Seven Summits Women’s Team to help out with logistics in the districts (see box).

In other areas, villagers will be paid cash to carry their own relief supplies from roadheads or material is dropped by helicopters. Tin sheets are in high demand as tents will leak in the rains, some villages need mobile clinics and others want bridges to be repaired.

Taking the right material to the right place quickly needs careful coordination and logistical planning, and on hand to help are Nepalis with experience in emergencies around the world. Subash Singh who was involved in the Ebola Mission in Liberia and the 2005 Pakistan earthquake was brought in by WFP to manage logistics in Gorkha.

“The biggest challenge here is terrain and coordination between relief organisations,” says Singh. “But for me the difference with other disasters is the amazing coping mechanism of us Nepalis. We are used to hardships, and we have a tremendous capacity to overcome them.”

As with other disasters, relief aid will taper off and WFP itself will wind down its logistical backup by the end of the rainy season. However, that is when the real work of long-term reconstruction of the estimated 700,000 destroyed houses, 5,000 schools, health posts and damaged trails will have to begin.

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Over the last two years, Nepal’s vibrant street art has received worldwide exposure and admiration for the personal and political messages. Many promising painters have been featured in international exhibitions and the media. After the 25 April earthquake there has been an explosion of art along Kathmandu’s roads with messages of loss and hope.

Shrestha Shrestha painted Hijo, Aaja (Yesterday, Today) in Kantipath with the help of her friend Matt Rockwell depicting two sets of couples, one crying and the other holding shovels and a pickaxe. “I wanted to convey that yesterday we were mourning, but today we have to get back to work,” Shrestha told Nepali Times. Passersby stopped to admire her work, and a policeman explained the painting to others who didn’t understand the images. “In other countries, it’s illegal to paint the streets, but here I was supported by a uniformed officer,” Shrestha laughed.

Hatemalo Abhiyan (Chain of Hands) is a team of fine arts students led by artist Bhishan Rajbhandari. The group is currently painting a three-storey mural of Kasthamandap (pic, top) on a wall in Babar Mahal to commemorate the temple after which Kathmandu is named, and which killed 12 people when it collapsed. “We want the authorities to understand that the reconstruction of these monuments is important for all of us,” said Rajbhandari, whose group will paint eight other temples of the Kathmandu Valley that were destroyed in the earthquake.

Another artists’ collective, Artlab, has launched a project called ‘Re-Color’ to bring back social harmony after the earthquake through art therapy. Passenbry are invited to join the artists with brush strokes on the walls to make it a community activity. Artlab has held workshops in Patan and Bungamati.

“I feel the children who painted with me were able to take their minds off the earthquake and get over their anxiety,” says artist Kiran Maharjan. Japanese artist, Mika, who started her painting career in Pokhara says she came back because she owes so much to Nepal. Mika painted several murals in Kathmandu before returning home. She thinks the colourful images cheer people up. “I wanted to paint a mural to make the people of Kathmandu feel happy,” said Mika who has worked with Sattya Collective to paint the walls on the Pulchok uphill.

Sanjana Mali, assistant designer of Sabah, was disappointed when a painted wall in front of the store came down in the earthquake, but is glad to see the new murals. “It’s so good to have new colourful artwork in front of the shop again,” she added. Stéphane Huët