

**DISASTROUS
COVERAGE**
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GOING PLACES TOGETHER

DISASTROUS COVERAGE

Attention, foreign media covering earthquake anniversary: read this.

Given the media industry's short attention span, limited capacity to capture context, and the scripted narrative of international news, reporters cannot be entirely blamed for often superficial coverage of disasters.

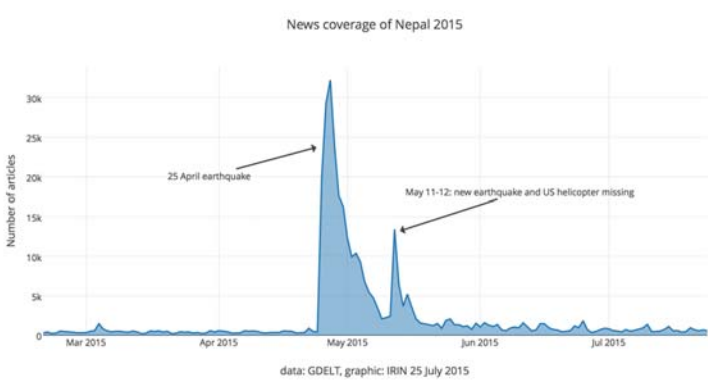
Anniversaries are a time to revisit disasters, and the sequel to Nepal's earthquake was written before the reporters arrived -- about non-existent government response, survivors still living in tents, and that none of the \$4.1 billion pledged last year has been spent. The truth, as we know, is little more complex. But it would be silly to let facts get in the way of a trending topic.

The coverage of the earthquake is in stark contrast to the Indian blockade, the economic impact of which on the country was much more debilitating than the earthquake. Which begs the question of why the foreign media and a self-righteous international community was conspicuous by its absence. Ditto when the Tarai was burning last August, and when earthquake relief was stuck at the border for five months. And also when the shortage of aviation fuel and diesel halted the distribution of winterisation kits for earthquake shelters. Hospitals ran out of diesel for generators, vaccine cold chains broke down, schools were closed and the country was in the throes of a humanitarian crisis. Foreign media could have made a world of a difference by being there when patients were dying in November-December 2015 because ambulances had run out of fuel. But those were not the ambulances they were chasing.

The Google Database of Events Language and Tone (GDELT Project) collaborated with the humanitarian news agency, IRIN to analyse coverage of the earthquake in the first half of 2015, using 300,000 articles in 65 languages that mentioned the word Nepal. There isn't much interest in Nepal till 25 April (*see graph*). The interest lasts about a week, there is a small peak on 12 May when a US Marines rescue helicopter disappeared and a smaller blip four days



BIKRAM RAI



West, and that dictates the selection of what makes news. Earthquakes make it, blockades don't. They just take too long to explain.

The Indian blockade was an asymmetrical response to the inability of Nepal's rulers to address the grievances of plains-dwellers, and its heavy-handed crackdown on ensuing protests last year. It gave the wily Oli government the perfect excuse for the delays in earthquake relief. He whipped

up xenophobia and ultra-nationalism, camouflaging his inability to deal with India, to get the National Reconstruction Authority up and running, and to hide political protection of black-marketeers. The Indians did Oli a big favour with the blockade, allowing him to get away with doing nothing.

In the midst of all this are the bright spots featured in the current and previous editions of this newspaper: the communities that have taken up reconstruction on their own, heritage conservationists at the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT) who are rebuilding historic sites with the Department of Archaeology, international organisations like Possible that have forged effective partnerships with the Ministry of Health to rebuild not just destroyed hospitals but also the health system in the earthquake-affected areas, or organisations like Miyamoto International and Childreach Nepal working with the Department of Education to rebuild government schools in Sindhupalchok.

These are inspirational examples of non-government organisations working with government to deliver valuable services. Ultimately, our goal should be not to absolve the government of its responsibility but improve its capacity to reach people in need.

News about slow government is no longer news to us Nepalis. It is a given. The real news is what we do despite that, make such behind-the-scenes partnerships newsworthy.

later when the chopper was found in Dolakha.

The GDELT/IRIN study further analyses the 33,000 mentions of Nepal on 25 and 26 April 2015 and found that nearly a quarter of the stories were about the avalanche at Mt Everest Base Camp that killed 16. Predictably, by mid-May coverage of Nepal fell back to nearly pre-earthquake levels even though the actual slow-motion disaster was just beginning in Nepal.

Coverage of the earthquake, especially on tv, zoomed in on what destruction there was, creating the misimpression that Kathmandu had been utterly devastated. Some monuments had collapsed, and those visuals were just too dramatically arresting to resist, but the fact that 90 per cent of the residential buildings in Kathmandu Valley withstood the quake did not fit the prevailing news narrative. Reporters are supposed to strive for accuracy, but disproportionate coverage of destruction in itself distorts the truth. One year later, the world is again fed decontextualised coverage.

If the GDELT Project monitoring had continued, we would likely be seeing a slight rise in mentions of Nepal on databases worldwide right about now, peaking perhaps on Monday next week. Thereafter, we are again bound to steep descent as Nepal and the earthquake once more sink back into oblivion.

News is a product much like what is called FMCG in advertising parlance -- to be gathered, processed, packaged and sold like a fizzy drink. The market is mainly in the

up xenophobia and ultra-nationalism, camouflaging his inability to deal with India, to get the National Reconstruction Authority up and running, and to hide political protection of black-marketeers. The Indians did Oli a big favour with the blockade, allowing him to get away with doing nothing.

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Times

THIS WEEK

Most reached on Facebook

Building back healthier By *Sahina Shrestha*
Non-governments work with government to overhaul medical services in quake-hit districts (14,571)

Most shared on Facebook

The Year of Living Off-Balance by *Foreign Hand* (75 shares)

Most visited online page

Brick by brick by *Lucia De Vries*

Most popular on Twitter

The Year of Living Off-Balance by *Foreign Hand* (57 retweets, 80 likes)

Most commented

"How many times do we need to share our story?" by *Seulki Lee*

YOUR SAY

www.nepalitimes.com

JUST WAITING

We lost two decades in the war and then political transition ("Just waiting", Bidushi Dhungel, #804). Nearly 20,000 innocents were murdered to prove the significance of an outdated ideology. Able-bodied youth were forced to migrate, and none of the significant development projects was completed. But those who kept us poor are now being awarded with plump ministerial portfolios. We have been dependent on India for everything, not just fuel. It was largely because of a senseless war that stymied whatever efforts were in place to institutionalise democracy in the 1990s. And they say they did it to build Nepal anew. If New Nepal is a country where we have to suffer 18 hours of power outage, fuel crisis and politicisation of all government institutions, I do not want a New Nepal.

Chhatra Tiwari

MOHNA ANSARI

It feels so good to know that Nepal still has some people who stand up for what is right ("PM gave us a lecture: NHRC", Seulki Lee, #804). NHRC spokesperson Mohna Ansari seems to be a bold woman trying to bring about some positive changes unlike the crooked politicians.

It has been a decade now since the war, and people continue to suffer. Somebody needs to stand up against this. Bravo, Mohna.

Niru Tamang

Our corrupt politicians are playing with fire. One day they will be engulfed in it themselves. If war crimes are not investigated properly and the perpetrators not punished, people will take the law into their own hands and avenge the death of their dear ones. And it will happen sooner than you can imagine. The only way to prevent this is to allow the truth commission work effectively without political restraints.

Dipak Shrestha

The tragedy of Nepal's war victims is that no one really cares about them ("How many times do we need to share our story?", Seulki Lee, #804). The Maoists who abducted, tortured and killed civilians are in power. They are split, but get united whenever war crimes are investigated. Those army personnel who have been charged with extra-judicial killings of civilians are protected by non-Maoist parties. Therefore, whether it is the family of Mukti Nath Adhikari publicly

executed by the Maoists or Maina Sunuwar raped, tortured and killed by the army, perpetrators are not going to be brought to justice. And we have seen during the recent Indian blockade how selfish and hypocritical the international community can be. We cannot really expect them to help conflict victims, we need to find our own way of truth and reconciliation for permanent peace and prosperity, and this process could begin when the Maoists publicly apologise to the families of war victims.

Yam Subba

Times

nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll #805

Q. Are you open to using the electric crematorium?

Total votes: 80

■ Yes: 85.9%

■ No: 7.69%

■ Maybe: 6.41%

Weekly Internet Poll #806

To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Is the Rs 200,000 reconstruction grant sufficient?

Devil and deep blue sea

Nepalis learnt long ago they cannot rely on their government, and recent events have taught us we cannot rely on outsiders either

Nepalis do not need an anniversary to remind them of what has been a recurring nightmare. A year after the earthquake and billions of dollars promised for rebuilding, 2.5 million people are still living in temporary homes.



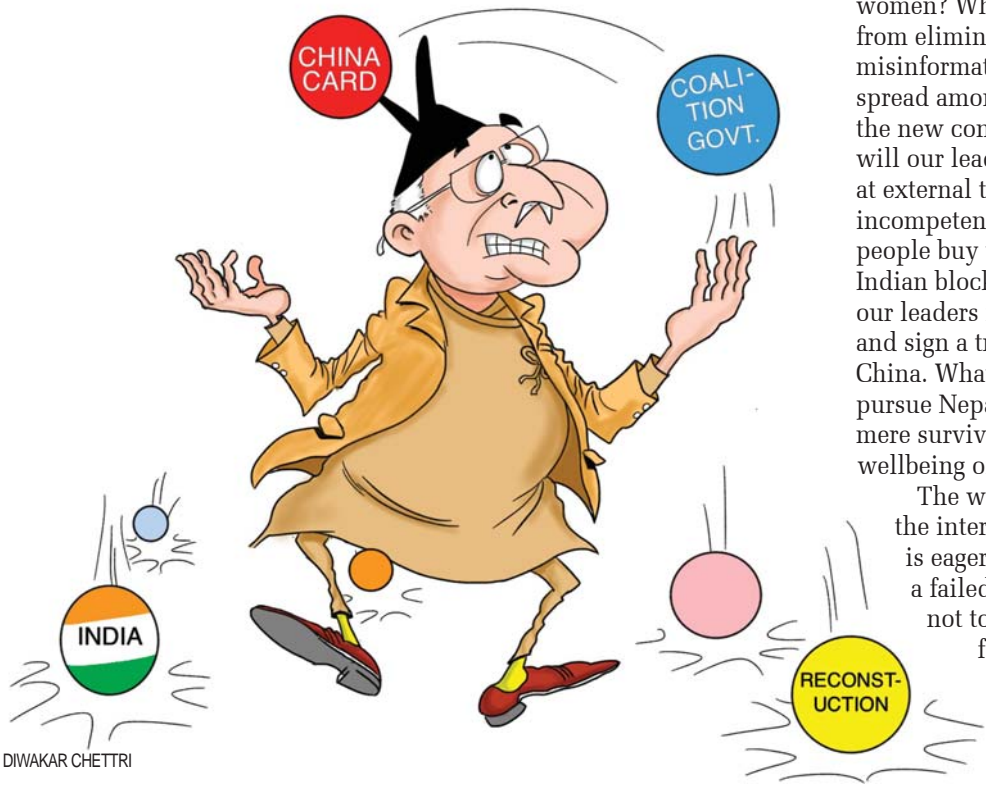
THIS IS IT

Rubeena Mahato

People have lost their loved ones, their livelihoods, livestock and homes. They have little hope that things will improve. Every second matters, yet our political parties took nine months just to appoint a CEO to the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA). It did not matter to them that earthquake survivors were wet, cold and hungry while they were wrangling over the NRA seat.

This lack of seriousness, an absolute disregard for the people's welfare and the shocking confidence that they are indispensable makes one wonder what we Nepalis ever did to deserve politicians like these.

Our tragedy is not that we live in one of the most perilous and disaster-prone parts of the world, but that we have inherited a political class that is capable of keeping this country in a perpetual state of ruin as long as they can benefit from it. With two big earthquakes and



DIWAKAR CHETTRI

an even more damaging Indian blockade, the year 2072 was not a very good one. But has any year been better? How long are we condemned to live like this? At this pace of reconstruction, whatever is still standing will be destroyed in the next Big One, which is inevitable.

Now that the blockade is over, there shouldn't be fuel lines and gas cylinders should be plentiful

and sold at normal prices, right? Wrong. We should be catching up with delayed infrastructure projects, but they are in limbo. With things returning to normal, there should have been a semblance of governance by now.

What has stopped the government from amending discriminatory citizenship provisions in the constitution to give equal rights to Nepali

women? What has stopped it from eliminating fear, doubt and misinformation that has been spread among Madhesis about the new constitution? How long will our leaders keep on pointing at external threats to hide their incompetence, and how long will people buy their lies? It took an Indian blockade to wake some of our leaders from their slumber and sign a transit treaty with China. What will prompt them to pursue Nepal's interests beyond mere survival for the greater wellbeing of their people?

The way things are going, the international community is eager to write off Nepal as a failed state, and it is hard not to notice an alliance forming that wants to discredit and delegitimise the Nepali nation. If our parties do not get their act together, there are more difficult days ahead.

For all their talk of humanitarian support and accountability, the international community was hardly to be seen during the difficult months when Nepal was being blockaded by India. Their disdain and criticism of the Nepali state, does little to mask their own selective application of principles of

human rights and democracy. It seemed as if they had no qualms watching millions of Nepalis suffer if that's what it took to teach Katmandu a lesson.

Despite knowing full well that India blockading Nepal immediately after the earthquakes would lead to a humanitarian crisis, the international community kept its mouth shut for fear of hurting India's feelings. There are now claims from different quarters that Nepal is facing grave existential threat owing to the Madhes unrest, but by failing to support Nepal when it was most needed, the international community has proven once and for all that it is not a neutral partner. Nepalis are trapped between corrupt and incompetent political forces within, and external powers without. Both are working to advance their self-interest at the cost of the ordinary people of Nepal.

Understandably, there is an air of cynicism and collective despair, but survivors of the earthquake and those reeling under food shortages caused by a prolonged drought in western Nepal, continue to do the best they can to survive day-to-day.

Much to the disappointment of blockade imposers, Nepal did not come tumbling down in those five months last year. And perhaps Nepal will continue to survive despite the doomsayers because of the fortitude and wisdom of its hardy people.

Nepalis learnt long ago they cannot rely on their government, and recent events have taught us we cannot rely on outsiders either. 🇳🇵

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SAHINA SHRESTHA
IN KAVRE

The earthquake spared most of the houses in the village of Dapcha 2 hours drive east of Kathmandu, but took away another essential commodity: water.

Since the earthquake last April, 15-year-old Purnima Adhikary’s daily routine involves waking up before dawn to walk half an hour to one of the few functioning taps in the area. There, she has to wait three hours for her turn to fill her jar. She has to hurry back home to get ready for school.

On weekends, Purnima spends anywhere up to five hours a day just collecting water for her family. Some of the springs near her home used to dry up in the dry season, but after the earthquake none of them have water.

Geologists say earthquakes often shake up subterranean rock strata which store water, and this affects the springs. Santosh Nepal, a water expert at the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) explains: “During the earthquake, the displacement of land surface also disturbs the groundwater storage.

NO HOME, NO WATER

The earthquake has disrupted aquifers, making this dry season’s water scarcity much more acute



WATER WOES: Nirmala Adhikary, 45, has to walk an hour every day to fetch water since the spring near her home dried up after the earthquake.

Gyanu Maya Shrestha (*right*) with her 24-year-old daughter Sanju rest this week in Kavre on thier way to get water half an hour from home.

As the land gets squeezed in some places (resulting more water from springs) whereas it expands in other areas (resulting less water from springs). Similarly, the interconnected water pathways below the surface get disrupted and water changes course. The water scarcity during this dry season has been made exaggerated by the earthquake.”

A study in Kavre District by Nepal Water Conservation Foundation (NWCF) and ICIMOD showed that out of 26 springs monitored, ten have dried up completely after the earthquake. “Immediately after the earthquake some springs yielded more water, but now the flow even in those springs has dropped compared to previous years and some have dried up completely,” says nepal. Binod Sharma of NWCF says it is important to revive ponds, restore vegetation so groundwater is recharged.

In Dapcha, the water level of Darauni Pokhari, which serves as the recharge pond for many springs in the area has fallen drastically. The flow of Thulodhara on which 200 households depend, has also come down, and locals say they don’t remember the water level

SHANKAR DAHAL
IN DOLAKHA

Nearly one year after the 12 May aftershock , there is still no official count of the number of people who died in the town of Singati, a line of houses along a road at the bottom of a narrow gorge of the Tama Kosi.

The rough count is 100, and most of them were survivors of the 25 April earthquake waiting for relief distribution from a truck that had arrived from Kathmandu. The aftershock triggered a massive rockfall that buried everyone. The truck was never found, and the bodies are still buried under rocks the size of houses.

One year later, survivors of the aftershock are themselves lining up again for relief – this time for the Rs 200,000 rebuilding grant that the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) started distributing from here this month.

The 12 May aftershock brought mountainsides down to the north and south of Singati, and since most people were from remote villages up the mountains of Dolakha, no one has an exact count of the fatalities. Says one resident: “For weeks rocks were still falling and we couldn’t go out to look for anyone.”

The men, most of them elderly who have walked up to eight hours to get here, wait

Waiting for Rs 200,000



LONG WAIT: Janak Bahadur (*above*) who lost his livestock and home in the 12 May aftershock waits for his turn to submit documents for a housing grant last week in Singati of Dolakha (*right*) which is still in ruins one year later.

patiently for their documents to be processed, looking confused by the complicated paperwork.

Utsav Shakya of the voluntary group, Saksham Nepal, says: “NRA has a card system to streamline distribution of the



grant by swiping it when they come to Singati to shop, but the paperwork to get the card is puzzling for most villagers.”

Ram Thapaliya of NRA admits that the reason for the delay in distribution the reconstruction grants to families is the difficulty in identifying real victims. The other is that NRA itself is short-staffed.

Here in Singati, people may not be able to read and write, but they know exactly what is causing the delay: the political games parties play in Kathmandu and the competition between them to control donor grants and to take credit.

“We are waiting and waiting, but it’s all politics for them,” said a dejected looking 48-year-old Janak Bahadur of Lamidada who lost all his livestock and home in the earthquakes. His four sons and wife are safe, and survived the monsoon and winter in a tent. With his first instalment, he is going to rebuild the first storey of his house.

The NRA has so far distributed its first installment of the housing grant to 324 families victims in Singati, Ladukh and Lamidada of Dolakha and villagers have been given blueprints for earthquake-resistant houses.

The biggest problem facing villagers is the shortage of water, most springs have gone dry after the earthquake (*see above*) increasing the drudgery for women like Kali Tamang who has to walk for hours just to fill a jar. Her husband works as a porter.

She said simply: “Surviving the earthquake was the easy part, finding shelter and food is much more difficult.”



PICS: BIKRAM RAI

being so low before.

“I waited three hours to fill up my containers,” says Sarita Shrestha of Hatiya, who came to collect water at Thulodhara after a tap closer to home dried up. “Even here, the water flow is half of what it was last year this time.”

The water shortage has increased the drudgery for women who have the task of fetching water in most families here. It has also affected their health. “Almost all of the women here suffer from back aches and some have even had prolapsed uterus,” says Sharmila Adhikary, 30, a health post worker here.

Vegetable farmers like Sushila Adhikary are also affected. S

he lost Rs 5,000 when cauliflower seeds she had sown died because of the lack of water.”There was no water, I wasted my money, labor and time for nothing,” says the 31-year-old.

For students like Purnima who wants to be a nurse, having to fetch water from a faraway source means less time for studies.

In Thokarpa of Sindhupalchok springs have gone dry in five out of nine wards, and villagers are selling off cattle and migrating. “One of my neighbours moved to Kathmandu with the entire family this morning,” says Kusha KC of local Mothers group in Gaurigaun, “another one gave away her cattle because there is simply no water

even for humans.”

In both Kavre and Sindhupalchok, there have been incidents where locals of one village have refused to give water to people from another, and women have got into fights over water. Villagers wake up at midnight to collect water and avoid confrontation.

Said Kusha KC: “We don’t have a house, and now we don’t have water. How do we survive?”



nepalitimes.com

Watch video



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Award night

Turkish Airlines held an agency award ceremony at Yak and Yeti recently. In the ceremony it awarded 13 travel and 5 cargo agencies for the year 2015.

Brand new SUV

Mahindra recently launched its new line of SUV- TUV300 in Nepal. The model boasts of stylish interiors, and



comes in variants T4, T6+, and T8. The prices starts at Rs. 35,95,000 for T4, Rs. 38,95,000 for T6+, and Rs. 44,95,000 for T8.

New ride

Authorised distributor of Honda motorcycles and scooters Syakar Trading Company Pvt. Ltd. launched



the Hornet 160R motorcycle in Nepal recently. With an added Honda Eco Technology, it comes with 140 mm rear tyre and a 163cc engine.

Sansui Bonanza

Triveni Byapar, authorised distributor of Sansui, recently announced its campaign for the Nepali new year. Customers will be able to avail 10% discount on purchase of Sansui refrigerator, 12% discount for Sansui LED TV and a free Yasuda iron for purchasing a Sansui Washing Machine.



prabhu BANK





TOUGH TO THE CORE



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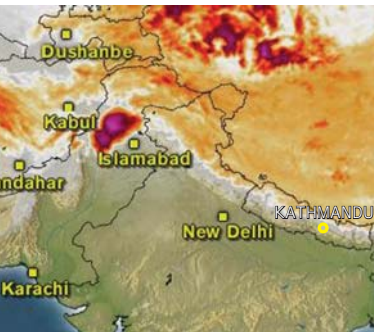


High-end hilltop hideaways present the best way to rebuild tourism in earthquake-hit areas

Gorkha Gaun speaks for Nepal's tourism entrepreneurs who will not be browbeaten by earthquakes, and who understand the high value of hilltops for the society and economy. Most importantly, these entrepreneurs understand that Nepal should not sell itself cheap when it has such a monopoly over so much that the world wants to experience. 

www.gorkhagaun.com

काठमाडौं: अन्नतल (९८५११०११५१), दिव्यज (९८४२४६८४७२), ब्रजेश (९८५१००४५४७), दिलिप (९८४३११७२७८९), पोखरा: शिवहरि (९८५३०५६१२९), इटहरी: नरेश (९८५२०५७६१४), विराटनगर: रोशन (९८५२०३२१७३), वृद्धवल: अनिल (९८५१०५०२२३), नारायणघाट: जुधिर (९८४५०२४४४०)



We are now entering the height of summer with all its resulting woes: water shortages, heat and dust. This week's evening storms cleared the haze a bit but this has removed the dust filter from the atmosphere making the sun hotter. However, the lack of moisture in the region due to a large high pressure area over northern India means that despite the searing heat of the plains there isn't as much cloud buildup as there should be. Saturday may see some cells forming over the high Himalaya in central Nepal, bringing high winds and some snow higher up. Afternoons will be breezy, sunny, dry with the maxima at 31 Celsius in Kathmandu.

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Trekking is child's play

YUWEI LIEW

Rosie and Freddie Mundell are among the youngest people in the world who can say they've been to both sides of Mt Everest. The young trekkers along with their parents had trekked to the northern Base Camp on the Tibetan side two years ago when they were just seven and five.

This month, the family returned to the base of world's highest mountain from the Nepal side (*above*) and even made it up to Camp I at 5,943m. Parents Neil and Polly Mundell say their goal was not to make or break any records.

"It was just the right time for us to make this trip," said Polly. "Both of us have plenty of high-altitude experience, and we had a brilliant expedition team, which is why we felt safe bringing the kids up to Base Camp."

A penchant for scaling heights certainly seems to run in the family. The couple met in Ecuador while climbing Mt Cotopaxi and although their attempt to summit it was unsuccessful, the pair hit it off from there. Rosie and Freddie are clearly following their parents' footsteps when it comes to their love for the mountains.

From the children's point of view, the hardest part of the journey wasn't the physical demands or the altitude. "The scariest part was the flight to Lukla," said

Rosie. "The plane just kept shaking and shaking."

The parents said their children handled the trek remarkably well, attributing their success to the preparation they had undergone. "We brought the kids up to Wales to do a lot of walking before we came over, and we made sure to teach them about earthquake safety," said Neil. "The first night we were here, we simulated an earthquake drill and got them to go the corners of the room with strong structural support."

Polly also stressed the importance of addressing the children's fears beforehand. "Because we had these conversations about earthquakes, they're not going to be as scared as they would be if something



happens that they don't fully understand or expect."

Polly and Neil also hope the trip would allay any concerns of their friends that Nepal was unsafe to visit after the earthquake, and know many who had cancelled their Nepal treks. They say trekking tourism is the best way to help Nepal recover.

While weighing the risks of visiting Nepal a year after the earthquake, Neil, a geologist, explained that there was actually a lower risk of a big earthquake occurring again so soon.

"Once the tectonic tension is released after a big earthquake, you'll get aftershocks of smaller and smaller sizes. So the chances of having a second big earthquake are actually slimmer," he explained. But the couple acknowledged that while life has its risks, they would not be stopped by their fear of the unknown.

"We were very conscious of the reality of an earthquake. With Nepal's geological position, I think it's inevitable," said Polly. "But it's like the terrorism. You can't let these things scare you or put you off." 🇳🇵




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Don't forget those who were wounded

SMRITI BASNET

For 22-year-old Divya Shrestha events of that day last year are seared in her memory. As her house in Sindhupalchok started collapsing, she started running out, but was trapped underneath the stairs. She was buried under the rubble for five hours until a Nepal Army rescue unit dug her out.

"I thought that was the end, that I was going to die," recalled Shrestha, who lost her left arm and sustained grievous injuries. But she was lucky, ten others in the house were killed.

Shrestha is among the estimated 5,000 among many more wounded who have been permanently disabled by the earthquake. A year on, they are trying to heal their physical and emotional scars, and get back on their feet and live independent lives.

Amputees and the paralysed are getting help from organisations like the National Disabled Fund (NDF) and Handicap International (HI) who are fitting them with prosthetics and providing wheelchairs free of cost.

"I had lost all hope, but now I feel everything will fall into place if I get a good job," says Shrestha, who would have completed her Bachelors in Commerce this year. She now wears a locally manufactured prosthetic arm below her elbow which, with practice, will give her limited

Disabled survivors from last year's earthquake are slowly getting back on their feet



mobility.

In addition to prosthetics, NDF also provides its 40 patients with physio- and occupational therapy.

"When they come here, they see that there are many others like them and they are reassured," explained the NDF's Shriram Panta.

In Sanga, the Spinal Injury Rehabilitation Centre (SIRC) has helped earthquake survivors who have backbone injuries with rehabilitation as well as vocational training and

counselling. One of the patients therein Yamuna Gautam, 37, from Sindhupalchok who was buried with her son under her home on 25 April last year. She is paralysed from the waist down and is still getting physiotherapy.

"We can't just sit and say we can't do it," Gautam said, "they taught me how to sew, and I think I could make a living with that skill. And maybe I can walk again someday."

Amar Budathoki from Dang was working at a construction site in Thamel when the building went down, injuring him. Now paralysed, he is worried about supporting his wife, two daughters and two sons. "I just want to know when I can start walking again so I can go back to work," he said as his wife, Gita, looks after him at SIRC. She added: "He cannot take care of himself, if only the government would help us with our children's education it would be a great relief."

Lekhnath Paudel of SIRC, which has so far treated 150 patients with spinal injuries from the earthquake, says what is more important than physical treatment or surgery is rehabilitation, therapy and the emotion support.

Families of the dead got compensation from the government, those whose houses were destroyed have started getting help, but the wounded and permanently handicapped have fallen between the cracks.

Guiding the way

Kesh Bahadur Tamang was on a tractor with relief materials in Laprak when a strong aftershock sent rocks raining down on him. Now paralysed waist-down he moves around in a wheel chair in the Spinal Injury Rehabilitation Centre (SIRC) where he received treatment for five months and is now a peer counsellor.

"The first question every patient asks me is when they will be able to walk," said the 27-year-old. "I know how it feels because for me it was very hard to deal with my situation initially so I break the news to them gradually."

Encouraging patients to focus their attention on other qualities like singing and writing, Tamang hopes to inculcate the self-confidence and emotional strength which helped him during his own difficult times at the centre.

He added: "I am very happy where I am now, helping those like me."





PROMISING TOMORROW: Divya Shrestha (22) gets her prosthetic arm fitted at the National Disabled Fund in Kathmandu this week. She hopes her life will now change for the better.

Yamuna Gautam (*left*) paralysed after last year's earthquake, learns how to sew at SIRC in Sanga. She hopes to make a living from this new skill once she is discharged.

PICS: GOPEN RAI

Although medical expenses of disabled survivors is supposed to be free, Sudarshan Subedi of National Federation of the Disabled, Nepal said: "There are no concrete plans regarding employment, handicapped-friendly infrastructure, treatment, education or skills-training."

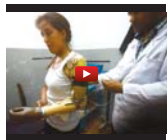
Sandesh Basnet, 15, lost both his feet in the earthquake and says it was difficult for him to go to

school. He has now got prosthetic feet from the NDF and can finally go to school. He said: "I had dreams of joining the army, but now maybe I could help those like me." 📺



nepalitimes.com

Watch video



LIEW YU WEI

This ability

LIEW YU WEI

While the earthquake last year spelt disaster for many Nepalis, 16-year-old Amir Bomjon got a chance to make something of his life.

Born handicapped to an impoverished family in Palung, he watched his mother work herself to the bone to support the family. Because of his physical state, he grew up feeling like a burden. When the earthquake struck, relief workers from UNICEF and the Karuna Foundation reached Palung to help survivors from underserved communities, and one of them saw Amir making a call on his mobile using his lips.

They recognised his enthusiasm for learning and decided to bring him to Kathmandu and enroll him in English and Mathematics classes at the Special Education and Rehabilitation Center for Disabled Children (SERC) school in Baluwatar.

Teaching himself to use mobile phones is just one example of Amir's indomitable spirit. Sketching, painting, and singing are among his many passions. When working on art pieces, he maneuvering pens and paintbrushes by deftly holding them in his mouth.

"In my loneliness, I started drawing," said Amir, "I had no friends so instead I interacted with my surroundings by drawing what I saw."

Celebrated Nepali artist Kiran Manandhar has been mentoring Bomjon, teaching him different brush strokes and the use of canvas and acrylics. "I am teaching him because it is important for him to be independent in this day and age. He is an inspiration to all artists," said Manandhar.

Amir's creativity also manifests itself in his love for singing and songwriting. Frustrated by

his physical limitations, he penned verses about the anguish he felt. Recently, with the help of two mentors, he gave voice to those feelings in a song dedicated to his main caregiver, his mother.

Amir was in the bathroom when the earthquake struck on 25 April last year. His mother ran back into the house while it was still shaking, and carried him outside to safety. The house was badly damaged. The song compares her to a goddess, saying he could never live without her.

Now, Nepal's most famous composers and lyricists like Durgal Shrestha and Nhyoo Bajracharya are mentoring him. When Bajracharya heard Amir sing, he described his talent as "perfect", even for someone who had no formal music training.

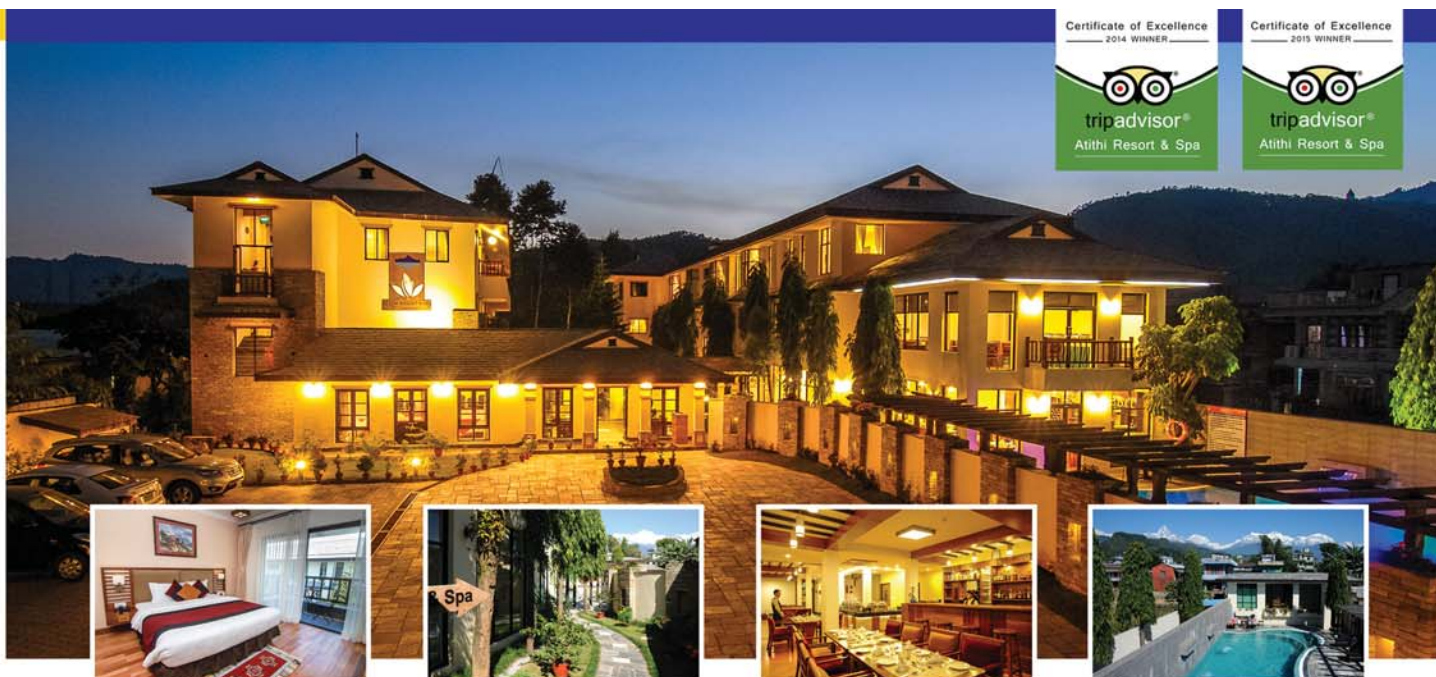
Amir had listened to Nhyoo Bajracharya's songs on the radio at home in Palung, and is now thrilled to be working someone who composed the songs he loved listening to. UNICEF plans to sell some of Amir's paintings, as well as a CD of his songs, at an auction in May. The proceeds will go towards helping other disabled children and paying for Amir's living expenses in Kathmandu.

"Amir is not a pitiable character," said Deepak Raj Sapkota of Karuna Foundation. "Disabilities range in severity and type, whether physical or intellectual, but Amir's thirst for learning is something we can all learn from." 📺



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ONE YEAR AFTER



Reflections,

An art and photography exhibition commemorating the first anniversary of the April 2015 earthquake by 25 Nepali and international artists.
25 April to 29 April, Patan Museum, Patan Darbar Square, (01) 5521492

TEDxPatan Adventures,

Engage in a discussion about the role of technology and innovation in the long term reconstruction of earthquake damaged buildings in this edition of TedxPatan.
22 April, 3 pm onwards, Patan



One year on,

Attend an art exhibition by the celebrated artist Hari Nepali as he walks you through the valley's heritage sites he painted from memory and photographs alongside paintings of the same sites post earthquake.
25 to 30 March, Hotel Moonlight, Pakanjol, Thamel, 9841242309, www.himalayanmaphouse.com

Face of hope,

Experts discuss seismology, humanitarianism and reconstruction work in Nepal as the country nears the one-year anniversary of the April 2015 earthquake. Followed by a photo exhibition on life after earthquake in Nepal by Christopher Phillips.
22 April, 5.30 pm onwards, Alliance Française de Kathmandu, Tripureswor, (01)4241163, www.alliancefrancaise.org.np

EVENTS

World Book Day,

Attend Sasto Book's event to celebrate World Book Day featuring book swaps, meet with authors, and a book fair. The books that are left after the book swap shall be donated. Entry is free.
23 April, 11.30 am to 4 pm, Alliance Française de Kathmandu, (01) 4223839, 9808411663

Kathmandu Kora,

Gear up for the challenge and ride to raise funds for birthing facilities in Nepal in the sixth edition of the Kathmandu Kora Cycling Challenge. Registration is free.
16 July, 7.30 am onwards, Mangalbazar



BAC Mela,

Local products, foodstuffs and a second-hand garage sale plus entertainment for the whole family at BAC's monthly mela.
30 April, 12 pm to 7 pm, BAC Art Café, Pulchok, www.bikaplaartcenter.org

Heritage ride,

Join Tour De Lumbini, Kathmandu Cycle City 2020 and Cycle City Network Nepal as they ride along seven world heritage sites of Kathmandu Valley.
23 April, 8am onwards, Basantapur Darbar Square, 9841303867

The Missing Link,

Park Gallery presents series two of its bimonthly exhibition with artworks by Saroj Bajracharya titled 'The Missing Link'.
Until 30 May, Park Gallery, Pulchowk, (01) 5522307



Get sporty,

Run, ride or rock climb and participate in the fifth edition of Himalayan Outdoor Festival.
29 April to 1 May, Hattiban Hills, Pharping, www.himalayanoutdoorfestival.com, 9823287228/ 9843817625

MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



DINING



Hyatt Regency,

Enjoy a sumptuous Italian-styled lunch at Hyatt's Rox Restaurant featuring a variety of dishes like mushroom, leeks and sage pasta, homemade tagliatelle, lamb ravioli and a variety of risottos and desserts.
Till 30 April, 6.30 pm to 10 pm, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, Boudha, (01) 4491234

Cafe Du Temple,

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Patan Darbar Square, (01)5527127



Lazy Gringo,

Fail-safe Mexican restaurant. The lemonade with refills is what won us over, but the food is mighty fine.
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Falcha,

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Jhamsikhel, Lalitpur



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MUSIC



All about jazz,

Celebrate the fifth International Jazz Day with a concert followed by a jazz workshop organised by KJC.
30 April, 6 pm onwards, Moksh, Jhamsikhel, (01) 5013554

Rock for a cause,

A fundraising event for the victims of the earthquake featuring Chinese indie rock band Wang Wen and Nepali rock band Monkey Temple.
23 April, 12 to 6 pm, Purple Haze, Thamel

Metal night,

Book your seats for a night of hard-hitting heavy metal featuring bands Binaash, Aakrosh, Nude Terror, DISORDER, Crown Of Thrones and Vivace Octave.
30 April, 12 to 6pm, Reggae Bar, Thamel, (01)4700654



Hip Hop Mania,

Don't miss out on performances by hip hop and soul artists Adrienne Mac Davis and Felecia Cruz Doors. Entry fee Rs 300
23 April, 8.30 pm onwards, House of Music, Thamel, 9851075172

Music mania,

Be part of the rock and roll mania with the 12th edition of the KCM Inter College Music Competition. Preliminary rounds on 15 and 16 April.
Registration fee: Rs 5000, 10am onwards, 23 April, Jawalakhel Football Ground, 9849149154, 9849465316, 9813505758

GETAWAY



Shangri-La Village Resort,

Escape the heat this summer with a two day and three night package at Shangri La Village Resort in Pokhara.
Gharipatan, Pokhara, Rs 7500 per person including one way transportation from Kathmandu, rafting and lunch (self transportation and non rafting package also available), (01)4420252/9808187015/ 9860260894

Mango Tree Lodge,

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Bhetani, Bardia, info@mangotree lodge.com



Neydo Monastery,

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Pharping, Kathmandu, www.neydohotel.com

Pataleban Vineyard Resort,

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Chisapani, Kathmandu, 9841679364



Tiger Mountain Lodge,

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www.tigermountainpokhara.com, (01)4426427, 9849194874

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Initially paralysed by the magnitude and rapid succession of the quakes in 2015, the Nepal government was then able to mobilise and coordinate security forces for rescue efforts and for public safety.



GUEST COLUMN
George Varughese

In the several weeks that followed, it was also able to galvanise the civil service to work with ward citizen forums to provide emergency cash assistance of Rs 15,000 each to households whose homes were damaged and vulnerable to the monsoons, and then to add another Rs 10,000 each to help them cope with the winter.

Since then, however, the government has not provided much more relief delivery. The National Reconstruction Authority was only formally inaugurated in January 2016, a full nine months after the disaster. Nearly a year after donors pledged more than \$2 billion for housing reconstruction (out of \$4.1 billion for overall recovery) families started receiving the first of three financial installments of Rs 200,000.

The government is yet to reach most of the families in the 14 worst-affected districts, even within Kathmandu Valley. For better or worse, other non-governmental and international efforts to assist the eight million quake-affected Nepalis have



DEVAKI BISTA

A border blockade and failure to get relief to earthquake survivors highlight Nepal's sorry state

maintained momentum in relief and reconstruction efforts, and there is better coordination amongst them and between them and the government.

The blockade along the Nepal-India border has been an oft-repeated explanation for the inability to carry out relief and reconstruction activity. Further, the protests surrounding the new constitution are said to be preoccupying executive and legislative government and diverting attention from the core business of governing the country.

A recent, perplexing explanation given by the home minister of Nepal implicates time-consuming governmental

procedures concerning relief distribution and indicates that it would take another year to fully deploy relief efforts. Given all this, it could be reasonable to conclude that relief is not a priority.

Attempts to address the energy crisis are another issue, given that electricity is available for only half the time for the past several years. The state of transport infrastructure reflects competing political interests and irrational choices, resulting in a mélange of hastily constructed roads and unused airports. There is a growing, nationwide epidemic of road accidents, and civil aviation is a tragic mess.

Thus, most measures of state performance in 2016

indicate the dereliction of the duty to govern. Meanwhile, there are perverse examples of government's considerable ability to mishandle restoration through hastily awarded contracts, inflate lists of survivors in order to provide cash to local political party cadres, perpetuate discrimination, condone violence against its own population, pursue ethnic and religious parochialism, and promote impunity through intimidation.


These are not signs of an absent or incapable state, but rather those of a rentier state, largely disengaged from the public and blithely engaged in the extraction of resources – from its natural endowments, the government treasury, and steadfast foreign aid. There is

across-the-board politicisation of state apparatus, democratic development is in a steep dive and the firmly entrenched cross-party culture of collusion promises to continue obstructing accountable governance for at least another generation.

Economically, the long-term implications have been to exponentially increase levels of brain drain and capital flight, while disincentivising investment. Tragically, Nepal has also enjoyed a year-on-year increase in foreign aid while demonstrating that its management of public expenditures and strategies is ever poorer.

While narrowly self-interested politics have driven the Nepal state's failure to govern, politics offers a way out of the quagmire. Whether it chooses to join or topple the United Marxist Leninist-led ruling coalition or prefers to stay in opposition, the Nepali Congress, with its newly-elected leadership must have a two-point agenda of action: to bring Madhesi, Janajati, and other protesting political groups to peaceful agreement on the constitution, and to conduct local elections as soon as possible.

On its part, the ruling coalition must urgently drive parliamentary and legislative business. This should not be too difficult given that the President, Prime Minister, and the Speaker are all from the parties within the ruling coalition.

Concurrently, the government must do what it was put in place to do: get relief to quake survivors before the next monsoon, reduce food and energy insecurity, provide public safety and security. With six deputy prime ministers, 22 ministers, ten state ministers, and two assistant ministers, excuses are unacceptable. 

George Varughese is currently on sabbatical from his position of Nepal Country Representative, The Asia Foundation



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Kung Fu Panda 3



For those of you who are interested (and I understand perfectly if you are not), Kung Fu Panda 3 is better than Kung Fu Panda 2, but not as good as Kung Fu Panda 1. This is primarily because even adorable pandas have their limits - and the talented,



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

hilarious Jack Black who voices Po, our heroic, fuzzy, goofy, Kung Fu fighting panda, cannot work miracles with a formulaic script. With each sequel Po becomes better at Kung Fu, winning the title of 'Dragon Warrior' in the second instalment, an event that pretty much defines the story arc of

that film. Po's posse, the 'Furious Five' members Tigress (Angelina Jolie), Crane (David Cross), Mantis (Seth Rogen), Viper (Lucy Liu), and Monkey (Jackie Chan), are as feisty as ever in this third film but unfortunately get short shrift, along with my favourite character Master Shifu (Dustin Hoffman playing a venerable, loveable little red panda who is Po's guru). Fairly early on in the film these brave fighters are turned into little jade talismans by the film's arch villain Kai (J. K. Simmons) - an aggressive yak who has been trapped in the spirit realm for centuries after having been defeated by Master Oogway (Randall Duk Kim) - a slyly humorous giant turtle who is the undisputed master of all things Kung Fu. Kai returns to this world having finally defeated Oogway in the

spirit realm, set on destroying all his competition, capturing the chi of all the Kung Fu masters in his jade charms, and destroying the Jade Palace that is guarded by Shifu, Po, and the Furious Five, and holds all the ancient knowledge and teachings from Oogway. Po, meanwhile, distracted by the sudden announcement of Master Shifu's retirement is even more disconcerted by the arrival of his real father Li Shan (Bryan Cranston), another giant panda who appears out of the blue (claiming he received a mysterious message from the universe) to look for his long lost son. Po, in case you didn't know, had, for all these years, been brought up by noodle store owning goose Mr. Ping (James Hong), who is in tears at the arrival of Po's real dad. Of course Kai must be defeated, but that is the boring part. The real delights of this film are yielded from the hilarious rivalry between Po's two dads and Hong's tender, crotchety, nuanced performance as a disgruntled, fearful Mr. Ping whose main concern is keeping his adoptive son's enormous appetite fed. The laughs are obvious, as are the machinations, making 'Kung Fu Panda 3' a great film for children but a bit boring for adults who might not be satisfied by just the albeit amazing 3D visuals. But hey, who doesn't love pandas, right.

nepalitimes.com
■ Trailer

HAPPENINGS



MoEA/INDIA

DEUBA IN DELHI: Nepali Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba meets India's External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj in New Delhi on Thursday.



DINESH GOLE

WRESTLER PM: Prime Minister KP Oli inaugurates the Internatoinal Wrestling Tournament in Kathmandu on Sunday.



BIKRAM RAI

WARNING: Madhesi leaders warn of another "decisive agitation" during an interaction program held by Federal Alliance in Kathmandu on Tuesday.



RSS

NAMASTE: US ambassador Alaina B Teplitz is greeted by an earthquake survivor in Barhabise, Sindhupalchok on Tuesday, where the US government is rebuilding a damaged Primary Health Care Centre.



RUPA JOSHI

GOLDEN DAYS: UNICEF launches Nepali cricket captain Parash Khadka as the goodwill ambassador for its Golden 1,000 Days campaign in Kathmandu on Thursday.

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Muslim-Hindu amity

Gani Ansari in
BBC Nepali Service, 11 April



I am a Muslim. He is a Hindu. Nearly 25 years ago, when our society was more conservative than it is today, our grandmothers tied the knot of life-long friendship, referred to as *miteri saino* in Nepal, between us.

At that time, neither I nor he knew the difference between Islam and Hinduism. It was not my choice to be a Muslim, nor was it his choice to be a Hindu. We grew up together, and we still celebrate our friendship free of any religious prejudices. But when I read or hear about sectarian violence, I wonder why people following separate religions cannot be friends like us.

I and my friend, Ram Narayan Gupta, looked somewhat similar when we were children. That was why our grandmothers made us friends. We always valued our friendship beyond religion.

I came to Kathmandu for higher education, but I still visit my friend in the village at least twice a year to celebrate Eid and Holi. Some Hindus do not drink water touched by their Muslim neighbours. Some Muslims do not drink water in Hindu households. But Ram Narayan and me eat together, without fearing religious consequences. My Eid is joyless without my Hindu friend. His Holi is joyless without me, a Muslim. He always cooks halal meat



whenever I visit him.

A few months ago, my friend invited me to his marriage ceremony. I took leave from my office to attend his wedding in Birsampur of Parsa district. I reached home, dropped my bags, and went to my friend's house. He had bought me a sherwani, his relatives wanted to apply henna on my hand. I felt shy, but they insisted. And I had to comply.

The next day, I accompanied my friend to bring home his bride. I sat next to him right through all the Hindu rituals. The priest chanted Hindu mantras for hours, which was different to my culture. In Muslim society, the Maulana needs no more than a few minutes to complete the ritual of marriage.

It is not just marriage that sets us apart from Hindus. We bury our dead, they cremate theirs. We need to take bath before participating in last rites, they

take bath only after taking part in funeral. Allah is the only god to us, the Hindus have countless gods. In spite of these differences, we have been friends over the last two decades. Our inter-religious friendship flourished because we always respected each other's faith. The azan's call blaring out of the loud speaker of our mosque never disturbed him. The ringing bells at their temples never irritated me.

We have learnt to value our interfaith friendship and religious harmony from our parents. Even now, when the Hindus in our village organise a religious yagya, we Muslims always contribute. When we build a mosque, they are ready to help us. But I feel Nepali society's traditional harmony is now being divided by caste, ethnicity and religious groups. If we cannot nip it in the bud, we will regret losing our historical religious coexistence.

Ambassadors at large

Editorial in *Kantipur*, 21 April

कान्तिपुर

For the past three years, ambassadorial appointments have been delayed due to political wrangling. This week, the cabinet finally recommended 21 envoys to head Nepali diplomatic missions around the world. But that brings more criticism than cheer.

Out of the 21 nominees, eight are career diplomats and the rest are individuals close to the ruling parties. The remaining quota for Oman has been reserved for Madhesi Janadhikar Forum Loktantrik.

It's a long standing tradition in Nepal to fill half the diplomatic positions with political appointees regardless of qualification or capability. The political appointees are more often than not still politically active. The same trend has been repeated -- another lost opportunity.

An ambassador represents the entire country. As a diplomat, the ambassador plays an important role in the relations between two countries. There are many examples where political appointees have gone against diplomatic norms to serve the party agenda.

On the other hand, in the absence of a parliamentary committee, it will still take some time before the envoys can assume office. In order to avoid further delays, it is imperative that the parliament introduce bylaws and form the committee.

The government has also appointed an envoy for Austria where Nepal doesn't have a resident mission. At a time when voices are being raised to close down unnecessary embassies, this move cannot be justified. In the past Nepal's embassy was opened in Canada after the Girija Prasad Koirala led government appointed an ambassador to Canada. The government should stop opening embassies just to create jobs for party cadre. Instead it should focus on managing the present embassies properly and closing embassies that are not needed.

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MANA MAYA DIDI
WITH HER GRANDSON BISWAS.
Ghumthang, Sindhupalchok

“His mother could not run away from the earthquake. His little sister was with her too. He is with me now.”



PHOTOGRAPHS BY
JAY POUDYAL IN LAPRAK

Portraits to commemorate the first anniversary of the Nepal Earthquake of 25 April 2015 with stories of hope, loss, and inner strength of survivors from Gupsipakha Shelter near Laprak of Gorkha District.

From the blog Stories of Nepal by
Jay Poudyal
www.storiesofnepal.com

AMA,
Laprak, Gorkha

“My son got sick and died. He will never return. My tears haven’t stopped. The earthquake took our house. You came, you are also my son. Come, take these seeds home. They make good pickles.”



BARPAK BORN AGAIN

The epicentre of destruction has also become the epicentre of reconstruction

SANTA GAHA MAGAR
IN BARPAK

The sun had set, and it was getting dark in Barpak, but even after working all day, ex-British Gurkha soldier Bhagi Man Gurung showed no sign of fatigue. He was overseeing a group of young men rebuilding his family home destroyed on 25 April last year. As Nepal prepares to mark the first anniversary of the earthquake in Barpak, the 77-year-old pensioner is in a hurry to move into his new house. He spent monsoon and winter in a flimsy tent in the past year, and does not want to endure the same hardship this year. This scenic village in Gorkha district bore the brunt of the earthquake last year, and most of its 1,500 houses were flattened. He could not rebuild his house

on his own, and the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) was taking too long to start distribution of promised Rs 200,000 housing grants. But the British Gurkha Welfare Society supported 25 of its former servicemen, to rebuild. “I served the British when I was young, and they are helping me when I am old,” says Gurung, “my new house is sturdier than the old one, and I will not have to worry about another quake.” The NRA is preparing to distribute the first installment of the housing grants in Barkpak next week, commemorating the earthquake anniversary. But many survivors here are not waiting, they have either already rebuilt or are rebuilding their houses. Barpak became famous when one of its sons, Gaje Ghale, won the Victoria Cross for his bravery fighting the Japanese in



of Nepal



SANTA MAYA GURUNG
Laprak, Gorkha

“Now I am ready for your picture. When you came to my house this morning I had just woken up. And I didn’t want my husband in Malaysia to see me like that on Facebook. I don’t want him to think ‘Oh, my wife is suffering after the earthquake.’ I need to look proper.”



JIT BAHADUR GURUNG
Laprak, Gorkha

“The earthquake taught me one thing. It taught me how unity can save lives and how no one is above or below anyone else. Nothing is certain, just this day, just this moment. All this hustle and bustle is a waste. The way the earth can shake, it taught me how together, we have a meaning and alone, we are meaningless. That day I remember I hugged my mother and thought, ‘This is it. It’s over’. Now, can I go? I have to go look for my mother.”



MALLAL GURUNG
Laprak, Gorkha

“Let’s just say, I am happy that I am breathing.”



SASHI KUMAR DHUNGANA
Bakreldi, Kavre

“My father built this house more than half a century ago. It was a good house. Even the bricks were handmade, using the clay of this land. The wood was cut with axe and saw. Too much sweat and blood has been invested in turning this house into a home. I was born here and my brothers and sisters too. I walked my first steps in this house. We all would go to school from here. I got married here and my children were born here. I remember as a child, we used to wait by the window, turn on the radio and wait for it to play at 5 PM that is when our parents returned from the fields. The memories have become more vivid after the earthquake. We have lost our home, and I cannot even find that radio.”



REBUILDING OURSELVES

NEW HOME: Ex-British Gurkha soldier Bhagi Man Gurung (*left*) is in a hurry to finish rebuilding his new house in Barpak before the rains. The tin shelter where his family spent a year is on right.

Farmers in Barpak harvest winter wheat (*right*).

Sher Bahadur Gurung (*below, right*) did not wait for the Rs 200,000 grant to rebuild his house.



Burma during the World War II. Many followed his footsteps, and Barpak is still known as a village of the brave.

Sher Bahadur Gurung did not serve in the British Army like his neighbours, but is retired from the Indian Army which hasn’t been as generous. Neither has the Nepal government, but he is not waiting for help and started

rebuilding with his saved up pension money, and is planning to move in before the rains come in June.

“Construction costs are very high now because workers are scarce,” he says. “But I will complete my house on my own. I don’t need the government’s help.”

The government has identified 1,447 families as earthquake victims in Barpak. However, Barpak VDC secretary Chet Prasad Amgain says all families who have got earthquake victim ID cards will not claim housing grants. “Some are capable to build on their own,” he says.

The earthquake’s widespread destruction of Barpak’s mud and stone houses was also a wakeup call for the people here, who are building back stronger structures. Binod Ghale, 40, had been working as

a mason for the last 15 years, but he did not know how to build quake-resistant houses. After the earthquake, he got training in reinforced masonry and is now using his new skills.

“If it had not been for last year’s earthquake, we would have not been aware of the new technique,” he says.

Barpak was already a popular destination for backpackers, and many here offered homestay rooms. Ironically, the earthquake has made it even more popular. New lodges have come up to cater to the hundreds of journalists and volunteers and relief workers who flocked here in the past year. Before the earthquake, Barpak had three hotels, now it has more than a dozen.

Dilsingh Ghale, a local trader is delighted: “The earthquake destroyed our houses, but it created a boom in business.”





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Nepal Bags Most Scenic Loo Award

GOVERNMENT HEALTH WARNING:
This week's column contains some flash photography and material that some customers may find disturbing. Read on at your own risk, but keep barf bag handy just in case. Do not drive a car or operate machinery while reading this, and doing so on a smart phone in the loo may not be such a good idea. Management is not responsible for the consequences.

OK, now that we have those legal niceties out of the way we can plunge headlong into this week's topic. You know a nation is headed for bigger and better things when it starts winning one international contest after another. After knocking out Namibia in cricket and overtaking Bangladesh as the second-most corruptest country in South Asia, Nepal has now beat the crap out of Iceland and the International Space Station for the most scenic toilet in the world according to Gear Patrol.

There was stiff competition out there for sure, but it's a recognition of our



growing self-confidence as a vassal state and a great national honour that this loo in Chukung below Ama Dablam has been recognised by the jury as having a better view than the first runner up, a urinal in Ladakh, and the third-placed pissoire at Singapore Airport Terminal 2. Hip-hip-hurrah! Another crowning glory for Nepal, ladies and gentlemen, a country that had already bagged the Golden Potty Award in the Smelliest Lavatory Category for its

winning entry: the latrine at the departure concourse of Gate 2 at the Tribhuvan Unintentional Airport, one whiff of which has been known to cure acute sinusitis in dear and departing passengers.

Now that the entire country is open-defecation free and we have all been adequately toilet trained, it is time to move on to other matters of national importance, viz: Nepal's trade deficit with India. Did you know, for instance, that since they are downstream from us everything we flush down the toilet here in Nepal ultimately ends up in India?

Since time memorial, we in Nepal have exported to India what we don't need, and in exchange we import what they don't eat: water buffalos to feed Kathmandu Valley's voracious appetite for buff momo. And now that we are all god-fearing secular republicans, we send our holy erstwhile national bovine to clandestinely hoof it across the border at 3AM. We also have a thriving bilateral trade under which we



barter our intelligentsia for their intelligence handlers. But more on that in a future column.

Speaking of thriving bilateral trade, it is about to grow exponentially after Laluland banned alcohol from April 1. Already, there has been a huge influx of Bihari Beer Tourists flocking across the border in huge numbers, and proof of this are the cars with Indian number plates driving erratically on the East-West Highway these

days. According to our usually unreliable sources, Nepal Police has suspended MaPaSe checks on Indian cars to promote cross-border tourism so that thirsty Indians can combine pilgrimages to Pashupati with bar-hopping in Thamel.

All this can only mean that as tourism income rises, Nepal's balance of trade with India will now be less skewed. However, to really remove our trade deficit in one swell foop, and even register an export surplus within this fiscal year, we must use our higher moral standing and the force of gravity to reverse the flow on the proposed Raxaul-Amlekhganj Petroleum Pipeline. So, they pump up diesel in the daytime, and we pour down whiskey, vodka and gin in the other direction to Bihar.



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