CONCRETE FUTURE

High-rise like this one in Kathmandu (above) and infillment buildings that replaced multi-story ones damaged in the 2015 earthquake, may not survive the next Big One.

On the second anniversary of the disaster, a reminder that Nepal needs to upgrade search and rescue capacity for the next major collapse of concrete structures.

OM ASTHA RAI AND SONIA AWALE

GEOLGY AND GEOGRAPHY EDITORIAL

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER

GUEST EDITORIAL

BY SURYA NARAYAN SHRESTHA

Coming together

A day after five major parties agreed to go for local elections on 14 May with or without Madhesi-based parties, five fringe parties from the Tarai announced unification on Thursday. Called the Rashtriya Janata Dal, the new party has avoided using words like 'Madhes' or 'Tarai' in its name – indicating that it wants a national, rather than regional identity.

On Wednesday, while Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal was asking five major parties if local elections could be held in two rounds to try to persuade Madhesi parties to participate, across town five Tarai-centric parties were discussing who would lead their unified party.

Dahal backed off after NC and UML leaders argued that there was no guarantee that Madhesi parties would participate in polls even in the second round. Madhesi parties, for their part, could not agree on a leader.

With 23 seats in Parliament, the RJD is now the fifth largest party – a position previously enjoyed by Bijuya Geichhadar’s party that recently dropped the word ‘Madhes’ from its new name. Upendra Yadav is not part of this party, but has also cut ‘Madhes’ from its name, and is likely to merge with Baburam Bhattarai’s New Force.

Manik Sahni of the RJD maintained the merger was not for polls, but to intensify protests against elections: “We can now push our agenda more strongly. The election is the least of our priorities at the moment.”

However, Janakpur-based analyst Surendra Laksh told us the unification was good poll strategy: “They were previously divided, and Kathmandu did not treat them as a force to be reckoned with; now their bargaining power has increased.”

Tarai-based parties are busy poaching cadres from other parties and discussing possible mayoral candidates. Suntosh Mahato of Samai, whose Siddhavvas is part of the RJD, says he wants elections, but needs to show voters some concessions to the prolonged agitation.

He said: “If we fight until the last day of nomination, the government will sign a deal out of fear. If we take part in elections after that, we will emerge as strong as we did in 2008.”

Om Astha Rai
Geology and Geography

This month, as Nepal marks the second anniversary of the 25 April 2015 earthquake, we are reminded once again of that curious link between geography and geology. The earthquake was a result of the Indian subcontinent plugging into and under the Eurasian landmass. Nepal is located along the rocky wreckage thrown up by this cataclysmic collision that started 70 million years ago and continues to this day.

The earthquake coincided with the visit to India by President Bidya Devi Bhandari, the continuing ambiguity surrounding preparations for the 14 May local elections, announcement by TransAsia based parties of a campaign to disrupt those polls, and contradictory signals from New Delhi about the Constituent Assembly. This is also the week that a contingent of the Chinese New People’s Army is in Kathmandu for joint training with the Nepal Army. Although the two militaries have said officially that it is about counterterrorism and disaster preparedness, there is some nervousness in Delhi about Chinese ‘inroads’ into Nepal.

Not to take the geological analogy too far, the earthquake and the ensuing pace of geo-technical investigations and preparations along the Matsi Himalayan Thrust was mimicked by the pressure applied on Nepal by the Indian state in support of the Tamang movement against the Constituent Assembly promised in September 2015. The Indian Blockade came five months after the earthquake and lasted as long. It disrupted already delayed relief and reconstruction, ruined what was left of Nepal’s national economy, and set back development by a decade or more. Geo-political aftereffects of the blockade were more devastating than geotechnical ones of the quake.

This 25 April, we must also introspect on the domestic politics that left Nepal vulnerable and unprepared for geopolitical and geological upheavals. Ruiners wasted the poise divided with covering-end squabbling, arguing about who got to form governments, how to conduct elections, about federalism and the Constitution. For the decade since the end of the war in 2006, Nepal has been governed by a political cartel that has demonstrated little accountability or concern for the welfare of people brutalised by war, natural disasters and political turmoil.

One of the primary factors in delayed relief and rehabilitation in the aftermath of the earthquake was the fact that local government units in the villages, districts and municipalities were staffed by bureaucrats instead of elected representatives of the people. This lack of local accountability had hampered every development project in the past two decades, but it became particularly acute after the earthquake – forcing more than a million evacuees in the Gilma Ram Hospital in Kathmandu to live at the roadside.

Much more painful, however, is the fact that Nepal’s ruling class does not seem to have learnt any lessons since the earthquake, or from the blockade. Nepal has been in no position to bill the Nepalese Reconstruction Authority into a broader Disaster Management Agency. If reconstruction in the 14 districts affected by the earthquake has been slow, programs to prepare western Nepal for the Next Big One are virtually non-existent. The strategy of creating construction jobs at home to slow outsurgamisation has remained just a dream.

The grand goal to diversify the petrol and petroleum alternative trade routes fizzle out.

Moral of the story: Stay calm, prepare for disasters and pay attention to geopolitics.

Better late than never

Two years after the earthquake, there is some justified worry that reconstruction is slow. However, we are much slower than the rebuilding that followed after disasters like Gujarat or Hurakan.

In Nepal, official reconstruction is really only started after 2015. Also, how can we expect reconstruction to be 100 per cent in terms of physical reconstruction of 80 per cent of all the development budgets went at the best of times. Reconstruction was done with no quality checks.

Infrastructure is still under development and will be in a state of disrepair in July 2017 when billions were pledged by donors. The post-earthquake perception was that there was this $10 billion from the money that reconstruction would take place in a few months.

One area in which Nepal was very bold was to respond to the need for transitional shelters until permanent structures were built. On average, 50,000 homes are constructed in Nepal every year, but we need to build more than 700,000 homes in the next five years. There is an immediate need to install more solar panels, more remote, more rural, more human resource, material supply and other support. Local response was given by the agreement of second round and the lack of co-ordination between various agencies. We need to ensure that the projects get implemented to speed up relocation. We may need to be more flexible in allowing various types of approved building techniques, while maintaining quality standards.

The 2015 earthquake did not release all energy accumulated in the fault, still there is a huge amount of energy left in the fault. We need to be prepared for the next major quake, but that last one has been a perfect example of concrete structures are safer. If the probability of future as an earthquake does not exist, we need to incorporate concrete buildings which can withstand more severe quakes and make us safer in the process. Conventional concrete buildings will mean destruction at a much bigger scale in the earthquake. Concrete structures are safer than brick and stone, because they take the load and do not crumble instantly, which is a fatal mistake in case of earthquakes.

There are some bright spots. Dhading Municipality is effectively enforcing the building code, and others are following suit. Communities are being trained in search and rescue. We need to be prepared by constructing new, just in the 14 districts in the rest of Nepal as well.

Guest Editorial

Surya Narayan Shrestha

A question that our students are taught is to always look at the big picture. A question that our students are taught is to always look at the big picture. A question that our students are taught is to always look at the big picture. A question that our students are taught is to always look at the big picture. A question that our students are taught is to always look at the big picture. A question that our students are taught is to always look at the big picture. A question that our students are taught is to always look at the big picture. A question that our students are taught is to always look at the big picture. A question that our students are taught is to always look at the big picture. A question that our students are taught is to always look at the big picture. A question that our students are taught is to always look at the big picture. A question that our students are taught is to always look at the big picture. A question that our students are taught is to always look at the big picture. A question that our students are taught is to always look at the big picture. A question that our students are taught is to always look at the big picture. A question that our students are taught is to always look at the big picture.

The annual week-long Bisket Jatra of Kathmandu is similar to our gompa ceremony and domestic chatel pulling, celebrated this week. You must know, it is a holy festival to each group of the festival is an exciting event.

Most read and shared on Facebook (34,287 people read 16 shares)

Mountainous change

Geopolitically, many see the current state of the Nepalese military as a key indicator of the country’s future. Nepal’s geography, like island states, can create a shared feeling of distance and isolation to reflect the region’s efforts together to reduce emissions.

Most popular on Twitter

New Year Readings for 2074

From The Great Gheranade by Ankita Singh to Dukhkie Amoni by Prakash. Gahan Bhagya, Sethi Dukhkie Amoni: Through the Glacial Melting Chitrakar, check out our book recommendations for the New Year.

Most visited online page

Push to undo hash ban in Nepal by Jalesh Shrestha

Is it high time Nepal legalizes medical marijuana?

Most commented

Qoute & Tweets

Gagan Style

An interview with Gagan Thapa about his first seven months as health minister has generated massive engagement across media. You can watch Minister Thapa online as he shares his future plans to improve the health of Nepals.

No Body Shaming

Thank you for laying out the repercussions of body shaming: 3D scanning by Shreema Shrestha (RIBA), Nepal. We don’t need to let our ‘katas molestol’ or city’s ghato pericho damel be harmful. Still, if all comes down to how we feel purified, then the society needs to reconsider the body image.

Mina Lama

TONI HAGEN

Agreed, Toni. Hagen was and is still a figure we ought to look up to (A Serious Sales’ by Lisa Chongay, 2006). His books and teachings should somehow find their way into our school syllabus to make you understand the importance of having a vision.

Ashrtya Thapa

Must Read

Correct assess the value of Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four, especially now (Ministry of Alternative Affairs, Soras Avai, 2016), it’s a must read for today’s youth as much as it is important for the generations to come.

Preetam Lalmichane
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Desperation for translation

The world does not understand Nepal, and Nepalis do not understand the world. We need translations both ways.

IN WRITING: On 11 April, an expected Supreme Court took matters into its own hands and gave Nepal’s “past, present, and future” full and final shape, in a judgment that is likely to have far-reaching implications for the future of Nepal. The judgment, which was unanimous, was delivered by Chief Justice Pradhan and Justice Bhandari, and was handed down on a broad range of issues, from human rights to gender, corruption, constitutionalism, accountability for conflict-era atrocities, etc. The judgment also dealt with the case of the former prime minister, former chief justice, and former MP, who had been accused of corruption.

The judgment was unanimous, and it is likely to have far-reaching implications for the future of Nepal. The judgment was handed down on a broad range of issues, from human rights to gender, corruption, constitutionalism, accountability for conflict-era atrocities, etc. The judgment also dealt with the case of the former prime minister, former chief justice, and former MP, who had been accused of corruption.

Two powerful neighbours, India and China, are important in Nepal’s foreign policy. India is Nepal’s most important neighbour, and China is also a significant neighbour. Both countries are important in Nepal’s foreign policy. India is Nepal’s most important neighbour, and China is also a significant neighbour. Both countries are important in Nepal’s foreign policy.

Pradhan, brought in from Darjeeling in 1991 by then Home Minister KP Dixit, stood its ground on occasion even during the Panchayat regime, and in thedákhiya era, the Bench has handed down landmark judgments to this day.

Nepal was reeling under the Great Blockade of 1968. The war in the forest, and no one heard it fall. The ascendency of Nepal as a bridge language over the past century has created a vernacular that binds the populace, but the process has also left us intellectually poorer. Nepal has a published corpus of no more than 50,000 books and of that a majority would be fiction, religious tracts or travelogues. Rigourously penned non-fiction treatises are few and far between, and this has resulted in a weakened intellectual class. Some decades ago, a significant portion of Kathmandu’s literati was proficient in Hindi and Bengali, even when it did not have command of English. This was because many heads participated in the urban milieu of Banas, Patna and Kolkata. This opened the gates of outside knowledge, and ensured that modern thinking entered the Nepali slipstream. Kathmandu’s novelists, shakys, political thinkers and journalists in Hindi, Bengali and English.

With the ascendency of Nepal, including instructions in the school system, that particular window on the South Asian world is gone. During the Panchayat era, the English languages and magazines of India arrived late afternoon at the Pipelkhel in New Road, and discussions every evening in the tea- and coffeeshops would start. The rise of the Nepali language media has led to a sharp drop in the reading of Indian papers, except for the Hindi periodicals consumed in the Kathmandu-Chitwan, and we are all the poorer for that. Online journalism on the internet makes Indian and overseas media available on the flipperats, but they do not get the clicks.

We must seek multiple paths through which Nepal is portrayed internationally, honestly,Ipsthes, and all. Simultaneously, we must seek to keep abreast with world events, to be able to respond properly.

We need a massive translation movement, with a dozen or so English works of fiction, non-fiction, classics and contemporary writings, translated into Nepali every year to educate ourselves.

To educate the world, we can start by establishing a system to translate key Supreme Court judgments into English, immediately after they are delivered.
Philim 2 years later

Dura Punyal Lama is 14, and lives in the remote northern end of Tamang Valley behind Ganesh Himal. Since there are no schools in this spectacularly scenic and sacred valley, he has to walk to Philim two days away.

The trek used to be treacherous even at the best of times, but after the April 2015 earthquake Dura risks his life several times a year walking along steep paths etched out of mountains maulled by landslides.

Now in Grade 6, Dura’s family cannot afford a private school so he goes to the Budhika Middle School in Philim. Luckily, unlike other government schools in the region, the school has good infrastructure and teachers.

It was designed by the Japanese group Asian Architecture Partnership (AAP) and won first prize in 2009 in the Marmomac International Stone Architecture Award.

The uniquely designed school, with its circular stone dining-hall and classrooms, survived the 2015 earthquake and was back in use soon after. But those of the five dorms were damaged, forcing students to live in tents for the past two years.

A fortuitous meeting in 2015 between Marian Hodgkin of UNICEF, Lava Deo Awasuti, then at the Ministry of Education, and VSO volunteer Peter Reid led to support from Rotary to upgrade the school.

Every month a Nepali restaurant in Plymouth, England, puts on a fund-raising meal for friends of Nepal and donates half the money raised to help the Philim school. rotary.

International chips in with matching funds.

Back in 2015, the trails to northern Gorkha were still blocked by landslides and the school was being supplied by UN helicopters. The money donated so far has been used for furniture, equipment, fixtures and plumbing, and Japan’s AAP will rebuild the damaged hostel.

Philim’s townpeople are hoping for reconstruction of the school, which has 13 teachers and 400 students, 140 of them staying in five dorms since they live too far to come and go daily. A British primary school teacher trainer will visit for three months a year to work alongside teachers in seven feeder primary schools.

Medical doctor Iman Singh Gurung, who grew up in Philim and completed his PhD as a Gates Scholar at Cambridge University, has been advising on rehabilitation of the school.

“The AAP is already involved in hardware, we should use the Rotary money for software,” he said.

Since the school is adjacent to the main Manang Trek trail, and tourist traffic is picking up after the landslide damage was repaired, the school is encouraging trekkers who stop in Philim for the night to visit the classes, interact with students and fund future expansion.

Look new

The Beauty Bar in Kathmandu has introduced gives on the occasion of Nepal New Year 2074. Customers can now get a facial, hair colouring, hair cut, full arms waxing, full legs waxing, and threading for Rs 500.

Qatar awarded

Qatar Airways has become the first airline to achieve compliance with International Air Transport Association (IATA) Resolution 753 at Hamad International Airport in Doha. The carrier was recognized after it fulfilled provisions for tracking every piece of baggage from the start till the end of a journey.

New Samsung

Samsung Electronics launched the Galaxy S8 and Galaxy S8+ in Nepal this week. Both phones feature an 18MP front camera, 12MP rear camera, a 10nm processor and an expandable 64GB internal memory. The S8 is priced at Rs 88,000 while the S8+ will cost Rs 98,000. Both will be available from 5 May. Pre-booking is available till 18th May. www.sbof4rebooning.com

BIZ BRIEFS
Disastrous discrimination
Dalits left behind as Nepal slowly recovers from the 2015 earthquake

Patrick Barron
is regional director for Conflict and Development at The Asia Foundation. Excerpted from The Asia Foundation’s blog, In Asia.
PATRICK BARRON

Natural disasters do not discriminate in who they impact. Yet an individual’s ability to recover is strongly shaped by systems of social and economic stratification. Dalits and other lower caste groups face particular barriers, which are making recovery more challenging.

Even though caste discrimination is illegal, most lower caste groups in Nepal continue to lag behind others, with 80 per cent of Dalits living below the poverty line. But after the quakes, common problems led to collective responses. Frequent examples were found of people of different castes, including Dalits, helping each other and sharing shelters.

Some high caste people allowed landless Dalits to build shelters on their land.

The earthquakes did not affect those of low caste more than others – the houses of 44 per cent of low castes were destroyed compared to 50 per cent for high castes. In the early post-earthquake period, low caste people were much more likely to have received aid than others (64 per cent of high caste people).

Concerted efforts by aid providers to ensure that Dalits and other low castes received support, strong community norms around distributing aid equally, and a sense of solidarity amongst the earthquake-affected that crossed identity lines combined to help low caste people cope in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. The Asia Foundation’s Independent Impacts and Recovery Monitoring (IRM) surveyed almost 3,000 people with in-depth, qualitative fieldwork at six month intervals, allowing for an evaluation of which groups are recovering, which are not and why.

The surveys found that the potential for pre-existing forms of exclusion and discrimination re-emerged with the shift from relief to reconstruction. Subsequent surveys have shown that low caste groups are now lagging in their recovery.

The third round of research (IRM-3) in September 2016 found that 82 per cent of low caste people whose houses were impacted said they had yet to start rebuilding, compared to 71 per cent of high castes. Almost one-quarter of those of low caste said they had made no repairs to their temporary shelters, compared to 11 per cent of high caste people.

Low caste people were twice as likely as high castes to report decreases in food consumption over the past year. And they were almost 50 per cent more likely to say a family member continued to suffer from trauma than other groups.

Over time, low caste groups have become increasingly less likely to receive aid compared to others (see figure). Whereas a larger share of low caste people in the first round (received aid) than did others, this pattern has shifted over time.

With relatively little aid available — and recovery slow — low caste groups turned to borrowing, which is not helping them recover, they are still facing credit constraints and there is a real risk for many of getting stuck in debt traps. Low caste people are more likely to have taken loans than others: 46 per cent compared to 33 per cent of high caste and 36 per cent of Janajatis.

Across all people interviewed, those who borrowed three times are the least likely to report that their livelihoods are recovering and most likely to have seen decreases in

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Times
disaster
2 years after

Food consumption. Repeated borrowing is also linked to people remaining in shelters. Low caste people are also almost twice as likely as others to take loans from moneylenders (22% versus 12%) and relatives (34% versus 19%) for high castes, both of whom charge far higher interest rates than other lenders.

Discrimination, often engrained in communities despite legal provisions, has had an impact in earthquake recovery. Tensions between displaced Dalits and upper castes in one village focused on access to drinking water from the public water tap. To avoid conflict, Dalits started collecting water in the early morning but others were not happy, Dalit children continued to face abuse, and there was pressure for them to return to their unsafe land.

The research found that Dalits were more likely than others to be living on the edge of settlements where land was unstable. Many Dalits often perceived that post-earthquake recovery was also discriminating against them. In DSM-2, 21 per cent of Dalits did not agree that everyone could access aid equally compared to 8 per cent of high caste people.

Material disadvantages that pre-date the earthquakes make recovery much more difficult. Low caste groups have a lower asset base and levels of education. The literacy rate for Dalits is just 18 per cent compared to the 48 per cent national average. Illiteracy, lack of collateral and an absence of social networks and information on how to approach financial institutions all made it harder for Dalits to access some aid programs. The next round of data collection is underway and provisional findings will be available in June.

Patrick Barron is regional director for Conflict and Development at The Asia Foundation. Contact the Asia Foundation’s blog is Asia, patrick.barron@asiafoundation.org

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21 - 27 APRIL 2017 #555
Back at the epicentre

SHANKAR DAHAL in GORKHA

Unlike most young men from Barpak, 31-year-old Koshi Ram Ghale neither opted for a military career, nor migrated to Malaysia. Instead, he opened a bakery three years ago. Business was just picking up when the earthquake struck 15 km below his hometown on 25 April 2015.

Nearly 126 people were killed in Barpak that day, the town closest to the epicentre of the 7.8 magnitude quake. Of the 1,200 houses, only a dozen remained intact. Koshi Ram’s bakery was destroyed, although he managed to save his own and other equipment.

He waited six months for help that did not come, salvaged timber and stones to build a temporary home and decided to borrow Rs 700,000 from a local cooperative to restart his bakery in the upper part of the town. Today, the smell of fresh bread greets visitors even before they arrive at the house. “I am in debt, but at least I have a steady income and hope to pay back the loan in two years,” Koshi Ram says. “The real problem here is that there is a shortage of masons and carpenters to rebuild.”

Two years after the earthquake, Barpak hums with the sound of brick-laying, timber being sawed and hammering banging nails. But most of the construction workers are from the Tarai, or even India. Ironically, many young men from Barpak itself are working at construction sites in Qatar.

Most families here say they waited for government housing grants, but when they found out it was too little too late, they decided to rebuild on their own. In the upper part of town, from where the view two years ago was of utter devastation, today the sunlight glints off the shining metal roofs of newly-built houses.

For two years Kumar Raj Ghale, 54, camped in a family member’s tent, waiting for aid. Fed up, he spent Rs 500,000 laying the foundation and erecting concrete pillars for his new house. He needs three times that amount to complete the structure, but the local office of the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) says the design does not meet its seismic-resistant criteria, and he will not be eligible for the rest of the government grant. The NRA has so far approved only 32 building designs in Barpak.

Kumar Raj says he didn’t bother to follow the approved design because the wait was too long. When the NRA finally announced the guidelines, he had already started construction. The NRA has advised people like Kumar Raj to strengthen their pillars and retrofit masonry walls to be eligible for the rest of the Rs 300,000 grants.

The dirt road linking Barpak to the highway in Gorkha is being upgraded, and economic activity is picking up. Direct bus service to Kathmandu means there is now potential for Barpak to be the gateway to a new trekking route to Mt Himalchuli Base Camp. At 1,300m, the town offers a stunning view of the Gorkha Himal range to the north.

Says hotelier Meen Gurung: “After two years, for the first time, there is hope for the future in Barpak.”

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SMRITI BASNET

Driving towards Nag Pokhari from Durbar Marg a stucco yellow former palace dominates the skyline, in stark contrast to the sea of surrounding grey. With its distinctive neo-classical architecture, the Maya Manor Boutique Hotel not only adds colour to the cityscape but indicates a new trend in Nepal’s hospitality industry towards boutique hotels.

As tourism bounces back from the earthquakes and Blockade, and with many international chains like Hilton, Marriott and Sheraton setting up shop, Nepali hoteliers have discovered that small is beautiful. Veteran hoteliers like Karna Shakya of Kathmandu Guest House fame have taken the leap toward small, sophisticated and luxurious accommodations for tourists.

“Tourism is never ending and ever changing. To survive in tourism you should know the trend. Tourists today look for a different product,” said Shakya, owner of the Maya, one of many properties following the new concept. Although grand in design, the renovated 1935 Rana mansion markets personalised service in a heritage ambience.

Lounging in the Victorian styled lounge in a small garden, guest Keith Mainwaring sounds pleased: “It is less formal than other hotels, more relaxed, sort of like a home.”

The Briton came for a business trip,
but has extended his stay by three days to enjoy Kathmandu. Inside the dining hall hang sepia-toned photos of the Rana era, and the living room is furnished with chandeliers and portraits of uniformed generals. But Maya does not bank on heritage alone, combining it with modern amenities.

"Tourists have always wanted to come to Nepal but we have failed as hosts," says Varun SJB Rana of Rabin Mohan Villa, which has a carefully designed 13-room estate with each room having its own identity. Guests can enjoy architectural styles varying from luxury suites modeled on the Rana era to wood-carved rooms reflecting Newar culture. A separate building is dedicated to the people and region of Lo-Manthang in Mustang.

The library is adorned with life-size portraits of Chandra Shumshere Rana and a glass case displays his clothing. Gym facilities, a rooftop swimming pool with a Tharu theme, and a spa are among the hotel’s modern touches.

"I hope they come and see that it is not unreasonable to make beautiful buildings," said Rana, an architect himself and a descendant of Rana prime ministers. He feels there should be more tax benefits for hoteliers who use heritage architecture, as the hospitality trade. For them, operating on a smaller scale is a way to carve a niche in the competitive industry.

Despite Kathmandu’s shrinking space, boutique hotel owners have found ways to make small properties profitable. Swarnim Boutique Hotel’s Sandesh Shrestha cannot think of a better use for a small plot of land he acquired in Bhashbastei a few years ago.

"Many Nepalis want a quick getaway that is not too far from the core city these days," said Shrestha, whose ratio of foreign to domestic tourists is 50-50.

While the pace is picking up, Dalai-La Boutique Hotel’s Prem P Gurung feels the country now needs to be promoted as a high-end destination.

"Nepal is better known for budget travelers and hence for the market is very small and niche," he said.

Located in the bustling of Thamel, Dalai-La combines Malla-era architecture with Buddhist and Tibetan designs. The 32-room hotel showcases works of local artisans, including hand-carved pillars, lattice windows and hand-printed linen and upholstery.

"To survive here you need to be courageous and willing to take risks," said Dhaubadel, recounting how the Indian Blockade last year caused his hotel’s occupancy rate to plummet to near zero.

Despite the uncertainties, Kathmandu’s new boutique hoteliers remain positive, and the trend is spreading to Pokhara and Bandipur. With the government planning to bring in 2 million tourists by 2020, a new door appears to be opening in Nepal’s tourism industry.
**EVENTS**

**Monthly mela,** BAC Malla. Local products, food stalls, and a second-hand garage sale plus entertainment for the whole family at the BAC’s monthly mela. 20 April, 1 to 8 pm, BAC Art Cafe, Pulchowk, 9815147776

**Movie screening.** Assist the screening of The True Cost, a documentary that looks into the fast fashion industry and its social and environmental impacts. Stay for the discussion on 27 April, 6.30 to 9 pm, Kalans Cafe, Jawalakhel, RWP: 9813693807

**Fashion fair.** Raise awareness on ethical fashion. Stay for the display by various fair trade and innovative Nepali brands. 20 April, 7 to 8 pm, ECHO Cafe & Bar, 9815119917

**Art25.** A live painting competition where artists will be challenged to complete their finest work within 25 minutes. 29 April, 2 to 7 pm, Nazgulsad, Patan. Deadline: 24 April. Apply: http://bickydzan.com

**Stand Up night.** Laugh out loud with stand-up comedians Striker Raneri and Tyler McElhaney. 28 April, 6 to 7.30 pm, Kafe Mr Coffee, Jawalakhel. Rs 800 per person. (01) 4471999. Extension: 7220/7158

**Poetic night.** An evening dedicated to spoken word poetry. Register to participate and hear fellow poets perform. 22 April, 4 to 6 pm, Nexum Culture Nepal, Patan. Register: https://nepal.com/story

**Hike and yoga.** Enjoy yoga while taking in the view of the hills. The hike and meditation session will be followed by a picnic. 22 April, Meeting point: Sunny Light House and Yoga Centre, Lakeside. (01) 4889714. Fee: Rs 1,000

**MISS MOTIVATION**

**KIRPA JOSHI**

**Over and over, we begin again.**

**MUSIC**

**Remembering Prince.** A tribute to American pop singer, songwriter, and musician Prince by Nepali cover band Firefly Nepal. 21 April, 8 to 11 pm, House of Music, Thamel, 9815197921

**Ciney live.** Live performance by famed Nepali artist Pradeep Agrawal. Every Friday, 7 pm onwards, Shambala Guesthouse, Hotel Shangri-La, Rs 2000 per person. (01) 4875099. Extension: 7220/7158

**Patan walk.** Explore the alleys of Patan and learn fascinating tales and histories of this historic site. The walk is facilitated by Sheetu Shah. 22 April, Start: 2.30 pm at Golden Temple. Entry: 4 pm near Patan Durbar Square. For more information: 9844394190

**Building better.** Share stories and ideas on how to build better on the occasion of the second anniversary of the April 2015 earthquake. 25 April, 5 to 8 pm, Nepal Community, Pulchowk. (01) 555566

**Jazz day.** Join artists from Germany, Spain, Italy and Israel as well as local musicians to celebrate International Jazz Day. Attend also for live art, film screening and workshops. 30 April, 11 am to 8 pm, Nagarkot. For more information: www.kappaz.com.np/pd070

**Dechenling.** The place to head for Bhutanese and Tibetan cuisine, their pleasant and spacious garden is ideal for big gatherings. Thamel, (01) 4577508

**Pataleban Vineyard Resort.** Just 16 km west of Kathmandu city, the resort is a perfect place to spend your weekends with food and wine. It offers astounding sunsets and views of the Himalayan range of Langtang, Gunesh, Marsial and Arnapauch. Chhapra, Kathmandu, 80461/7984. pataleban@nmsl.com.np

**Piano B&B.** Enjoy a comfortable stay, sumptuous Italian food and great hospitality at Piano B&B in Kathmandu. (07) 5688087

**Club Himalaya.** For amazing mountain views and refreshing weekend escapades, special package available for Nepalis and expatriates. Argyll, 440942

**Last Resort.** Camping, hiking, rock climbing, rafting, mountain biking, bungee jumping – test your limits at the Last Resort. Bhimad, (01) 4754304/4756925. info@lastresort.com.np

**Gokarna Forest Resort.** A luxurious paradise that rewards you and encourages meditation. Just a 30-minute drive from Kathmandu. Gokarna, (01) 4815702. info@gokarna.net

**Athihi Resort & Spa.** A quiet sanctuary that fuses Nepali tradition with modern amenities, campfire with a fancy pool and a cozy restaurant. Lakeside, Patan. (01) 4866700. info@athihiresort.com

**Solid Rock.** Enjoy a relaxing stay in this traditional Nepali farmhouse away from the hustle and bustle of Kathmandu city. Solid Rock Lodge & Restaurant, Dhulikhel. (01) 4793099

**miss MOTIVATION**

**KIRPA JOSHI**

**Over and over, we begin again.**

**DINING**

**Booth Books & Bakes.** A quiet, snug place offering a rich selection of cakes and pastries. Maharajgunj, 9851193622

**The Vesper House.** Great for leisurely dining, serves diverse foods that reflect Italian and Mexican influences. Jawalakhel, 9815548717

**Tasneem’s Kings Kitchen.** A charming restaurant proposing the unique flavours of distinctive South Muslim food. Jomshum, 9815282727, (01) 2239522

**Kanta dAb dAb live.** Spend a musical evening with this star, percussion and bass trio. Enjoy as they entice you to groove with their fusion beats. 28 April, 7:30 to 10:30 pm, Places Restaurant & Bar, South Gomti Marg, (01) 4704012

**Café Swotha.** Art miniature seating in the heart of Patan, with an atmosphere of sophistication, romantic warmth. Patan, (01) 5557184. info@traditionsnepomex.com

**Dechenling.** The place to head for Bhutanese and Tibetan cuisine, their pleasant and spacious garden is ideal for big gatherings. Thamel, (01) 4577508

**Pasagi live.** Drink and wine with friends and family at Nepali brand Pasagi belts out some of its best numbers. 21 April, 6 to 10 pm, Anjali Lounge, (01) 5008861

**Solid Rock.** Enjoy a relaxing stay in this traditional Nepali farmhouse away from the hustle and bustle of Kathmandu city. Solid Rock Lodge & Restaurant, Dhulikhel. (01) 4793099

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Righting reconstruction-gone-wrong

Kathmandu’s youth have taken the lead in lobbying for more sensitive restoration of heritage sites destroyed in the 2015 earthquake

ALOK TULADHAR

Even before the earthquake, Kathmandu Valley’s temples, heritage sites and monuments were being degraded by urban pressure. Two years ago, on 25 March 2015, the Valley suffered its worst loss of cultural heritage since the 1934 earthquake. The government said it would need at least $600 million to rebuild.

The traditional architectural style and the urban space of the Valley are integral to the ethnic and cultural identity of its people, and the damage caused by the earthquake have further weakened links to community centres and rituals. The physical structure of the monuments translate into a loss of the Valley’s intangible heritage. Traditional festivities and rituals have suffered because of a decrease in financial support from communities and the government.

The Post-Disaster Recovery Framework (PDRF) in 2015 planned to completely restore affected cultural heritage in six years. The Department of Archaeology (DoA) was designated the main custodian in planning, managing and supervising the rebuilding and restoration process.

However, the ground reality two years hence is that the DoA is not following the Framework guidelines. The National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) has approved reconstruction and renovation of nearly 70 cultural heritage sites and monuments so far, half of which are in various stages of implementation. Most DoA-funded renovation and reconstruction, especially the larger projects, are being criticised by conservationists, culture experts, local communities and the public.

The reconstruction contracts were given to commercial companies that submitted the lowest bids, even if they had no prior experience in heritage restoration. The DoA’s main justification is that government procurement rules did not allow them to implement the contracts to any other way. Research, quality control, local community participation and intangible cultural heritage practices were non-existent during reconstruction. In some cases, like the 17th-century Kali Pokhari and pre-Lichhavi Tundal Devi, concrete and steel were used to replace traditional materials.

In response, spontaneous, informal groups have sprung up across Kathmandu Valley to lobby the government to treat heritage restoration with sensitivity. These youth-led groups have used social and mainstream media campaigns, public meetings, petitions and started small-scale reconstruction with community funding.

Good examples are the restoration of the Lichchhavi-era Ashoka Chittra in Thamel and the youth initiative on restoring Nepal’s oldest public monument, Kathmandumandap, which was destroyed in the quake.

As a result of public outrage and national media attention, the government is under pressure to introduce bylaws or modify existing laws to find a viable alternative to the lowest-bidder system. There are indications that community demands for greater public participation and transparency in heritage recovery will be incorporated in the government’s new implementation mechanisms.

The youth-led initiative has been instrumental in raising public awareness about heritage issues. It has lobbied with elected Members of Parliament and influential political leaders as well as the UNESCO office in Nepal. The Cabinet is expected to soon direct the NRA to abolish or amend the current inappropriate mechanisms in heritage reconstruction.

Although the public activism is encouraging, there is much uncertainty about how the political elite and senior bureaucrats will react. There is still a possibility that the government will ignore the pressure to adopt prevailing procurement mechanisms. The youth movement is not yet institutionalised and without clear and strong leadership could fizzle out.

Kathmandu Valley’s communities have built, maintained and rebuilt historic buildings after every earthquake. We can do the same now provided the government plays an enabling role by providing guidelines and technical supervision, and lets experts handle restoration.

Alok Tuladhar is member of the community-based Rebuild Kathmandumandap team. aloktuladhar@gmail.com
MUST SEE
Sophia Pandey

Not everyone wants to watch a film about the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing. Mainstream cinema is for escapism, and standing witness to a horrific event is just not the reason people spend whatever it is they spend these days to go to the cinema.

Unfortunately for Patriots Day, which is quite a fine film, this distinction caused it to do very poorly at the box office: it earned a mere $44.3 million (to date) against a budget of $45 million, which officially makes it a financial failure, even as it ought to be praised for so grimly hewing to the truth.

Anchored by the stout Mark Wahlberg, who plays Sergeant Tommy Saunders, and by John Goodman as Boston Police Commissioner Ed Davis, the film follows the events leading up to - and the chase after - the two bombings that occurred just as at the first runners started to cross the finish line, killing three people, maiming 160 (who lost their limbs) and injuring several hundred others.

The bombing on the Patriot’s Day holiday was a nightmare for Boston, and precipitated a manhunt for the now infamous Tsarnaev brothers that shook the nation.

Patriots Day is aptly named: it is a film about the fortitude and the resilience of humanity in the face of the banality that can constitute evil. The portrayal of the real life characters who were injured, the gripping police procedural that follows, and the terrible callousness of the Tsarnaev brothers as they shoot a police officer dead in his car when he doesn’t give up his gun, the car-jacking and subsequent escape of a terrified, young Chinese immigrant, Dun Meng (Jimmy Q Yang), who then gives evidence crucial in capturing the brothers, are all here in precise detail.

The film is not fun viewing, but it is pretty essential if you want to understand how things work. This is a disciplined movie, with its nuts and bolts carefully in place to manufacture a clear picture of a bizarre, horrendous day in American history.

Perhaps what sticks most in my memory are the scenes in the hijacked car, attested to by Meng, when Dzhokhar (Alex Wolff) is sitting with his older brother Tamerlan (Themo Melikidze) because he has been given neither a gun nor been allowed to drive; he was 19 years old at the time. Equally searing is the gunshot in the Boston suburb of Watertown: a harrowing scene that documents the shootout from moment to moment with JK Simmons in a riveting performance as Jeffrey Pugliese, a Watertown police sergeant who goes head to head with Tamerlan just before he is killed.

There is a reason why there are so many films like Patriots Day: people just don’t have the stomach to watch them, this reviewer included. But, if you can grit your teeth and buckle down, you will not regret this film, which will teach you the essence of both bravery and cowardice.

LOVE THE NEIGHBOUR: President of India Pranab Mukherjee, and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi receive President Bidya Devi Bhandari of Nepal in New Delhi on Tuesday.

ELECTION AGENDA: Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets with heads of security forces at Ballia to discuss security ahead of the local election.

UNION MEETING: Five fringe parties from the Tandu announce unification in Kathmandu on Thursday. Their unified party is called Rashtriya Janta Party.

JOINT FORCES: Nepal Army Major General Shri Shrestha Shrestha shares hands with participants in the first Nepal-China joint military training in Kathmandu on Saturday.

IN LINE: Women of Nepal’s community take part in Sagun Jatra, celebrated on the eight day of Bisket Jatra in Bhaktapur on Monday.
Kathmandu candidates

Bhaskar Sharma in www.nagarkirti.com
14 April

Nepal’s two main political parties are the
first ones to announce mayoral candidates
for Kathmandu’s municipality elections next
month.
As a time when the NC, UML and other
established parties look undecided over
candidates, journalist-turned-politician
Rababka Mahat’s
Saja Party and the youth-based Ibibohesh
Hepali – both of which
have never fought
elections – have chosen
two unconventional
politicians, former
secretary Krishna Thapa
and 27-year-old student
Rajendra Dhakal.

Thapa of the Saja Party was a JC
leader, studied architecture
and served as a top bureaucrat for 12 years. If
elected, he says he will expand roads in
Kathmandu, expedite the Kathmandu and
Guge Ring road projects and introduce a
20-year energy development plan.
Thapa argues Kathmandu needs a
political leader with administration and
in-depth knowledge, and claims to be
one. “I am familiar with every alley of
Kathmandu,” he says. “I have worked to develop Kathmandu. Now I
want to lead the city politically.”
Rajendra Dhakal, Ibibohesh Nepal’s
candidate, has none of the experience that
Thapa does. But she has emerged as a feisty
youth politician after joining Ibibohesh Nepal
three years ago.
Thapa was born the year the Maoist
war began, and was just one year old when
Nepal last held local elections in 1997.
She says she had to suffer because of the
mass-extermination by Maoists, and joined
politics to even that up.
“If elected, I will work to make
Kathmandu greener, pedestrian-friendly
and a place where everyone can work and
live peacefully,” says Baral, a bachelor
student of development studies.
Building back unsafe

Property owners in Gongabu continue to flout the building code

TWO years after the earthquake, it looks like reconstruction is finally taking on momentum. But remote villages in inner Dolakha, most survivors are using cement blocks to rebuild damaged and destroyed homes. For magnitude, intensity and duration of the earthquake on 25 April 2015 were just under the threshold for concrete structure collapse, so most concrete buildings in Kathmandu survived. There is therefore a notion that reinforced concrete buildings are stronger and safer.

The last minute round of inspections that concrete structures will withstand the next big earthquake, but subsidence in cement blocks can lead to ‘heads up’ if not wobbly. Structural engineers Suraj Narayan Shrestha at the National Society for Earthquake Technology Nepal (NSET).

Nepal was extremely lucky that the 2015 earthquake hit on a Saturday and mostly brought down brick, stone and clay houses. But the next time we may not be as fortunate because existing concrete buildings and new temporary construction may not be strong enough to withstand the greater shaking. The Kathmandu Earthquake did not release all the energy accumulated along the Main Himalayan fault, which means there could be another big earthquake at any time near Kathmandu. Seismologists also predict a mega-quake in western Nepal, where accumulated energy has not been released for 700 years. Both need strong, well designed and constructed concrete structures in Kathmandu.

The government insists that constructed concrete will be built as new and not existing buildings. This is a common misconception: new buildings must be designed to withstand future earthquakes. The government insists that constructed concrete will be built as new and not existing buildings. This is a common misconception: new buildings must be designed to withstand future earthquakes.
Cementing a future

I was one disaster after another for 41-year-old Ram Krishna Awale (above) two years ago. He had returned home after cremating his relative just before noon on 25 April 2015 when his house in Patan started shaking violently. A clay mortar structure built before the 1934 earthquake, it was severely damaged. His other cement house also suffered structural damage.

Today, Awale is rebuilding his new home following the government’s new building guidelines, and claims to have made it even safer than required by using 14x6.6-in pillars and 22-in walls for the five-storey concrete building. He has removed all heavy structures in his new house, for example replacing the concrete staircase with a steel one.

“I have experienced first-hand what an earthquake is like. I don’t want to put my family at risk with a weak building. It is costing me more, but at least I will get to sleep well at night,” said the clothing shop owner.

Across the street, Surel Ila Awale, 63, has also finished rebuilding his home. He was previously living with his extended family in a traditional Newari mud brick building which was heavily damaged. His new home is a four-storey concrete structure with a traditional Newari facade.

“I couldn’t stay in the clay brick house anymore, so I decided to make a concrete building that is sturdier and also keep our building tradition alive,” he said.

It is sure, the trend towards modernising traditional architecture had started in Patan even before the earthquake. But many more residents whose homes were damaged in the quake are trying to blend traditional façades with hidden concrete beams and pillars.

The move to combine old and modern has also been spurred by the rise in homestay tourism in Patan. Residents have realised that guests do not like to rent out ugly concrete and glass structures.

Surel and Surel Ila both agree they had tourism in mind while rebuilding their new homes in the Lichhad-Newari style, but admit it made the construction much more expensive because the craftsmen were difficult to find.

Suresh Krishna: “But we decided the added expense was worth it because it preserved the traditional architecture while making the structure safer.”

Sonia Awale

Concrete houses and rescue more difficult in the next Big One

In fact, the Nepali Army, APP and Nepal Police do not currently have enough of the necessary equipment for Collapsed Structure Search and Rescue so they can search and locate people trapped in the debris of collapsed concrete floors. They will need pneumatic drills, sturdy rescue saws, concrete cutters, digging hammers, hydraulic shoring, and life detectors (like thermal, CO, and snake-eye.

“The major lesson from 2015 is that we need to train and equip community-level first responders so they can do the surface rescue before the specialised teams arrive,” explains Ganesh Kumar Jana, an NSP instructor involved in search and rescue. In Bungamati and Dhulikhel two years ago.

In the 2015 earthquake, more than 4,000 international rescuers from 19 countries spent millions of dollars to rescue a dozen or so people, while local communities and security agencies employed simple digging equipment to pull out more than 5,000 people from the rubble.

Experts say training communities and resources to use heavy equipment is the next crucial step in preparing for future disasters. In 2015, excavators and bulldozers were sometimes used to dig into the rubble while survivors were still trapped inside. Locals had no knowledge about moving victims with broken bones and severe trauma.

Besides the Army and Police, first responders can also be volunteers from local communities, private security guards, the first-aid brigade, college students and teachers. Rescue paragraphs, including digging and lifting equipment, lights, stretchers and first-aid, need to be pre-positioned in neighbourhoods, water tanks and tents stockpiled in dry-ground open spaces, and drills should be held regularly to enhance preparedness.

Jana remembers reaching Charara on the night of 25 April 2015 only to find there was no heavy equipment to move house-size blocks of concrete masonry to find survivors. He protested that communities must be trained in emergency rescue because the time specialised teams arrive it may be too late.

He adds: “We have no choice, we must be even better prepared with training and equipment for the next big quakes because there will be a lot more concrete structures that will collapse.”
Headlines on deadline

Honest officials are as journos there are some goings on in the domestic and international media that inadvertently fall between the cracks. But as the propagators of history in a hurry, it is incumbent upon us to make sure we influence public awareness and safeguard the public’s right to say no. So, while being on our side, let us now, and without further ado, be vested around the bush where a bird is not worth much as the two in the hand, yet the straight to the main points of the news.

One Belt One Rube

After the photograph of PKD in PJs went viral on social media, the First Couple has confidentially held a press conference off the record what they were up to last month in the Honeymoon Suite of the Soow-Wow Asia.

Forum Hams in Eban

Apparently, President K had told Prime Minister Fraserella “Get on the Silk Road,” and TBK mused, “Fat on the silk robes.” Which is what he and Cormade Sla did as soon as they got back to their room.

Wee-wee Tweet

It is not only Donald Trump who tweets in the wee hours. Our very own Second Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Giravannel Nanda got on Twitter at 1AM this week to cast doubts about local elections ever being held. The next day, after a bell broke loose, he quickly clarified that English is not his first language, and in any case he works day and night, and besides he had a cough.

Civil Servants, Civil Disobedience

The Overall Nepal Civil Servants Confederation has called a bandh on Friday to protest the government’s “apartheid and unjust” decision to cancel a previously scheduled holiday to celebrate the sale return of President Bhandari from her state visit to India. Civil servants said they needed the day off to stay home and ponder the significance of the president’s trip to strengthen bilateral relations between the two neighbours, and to mourn whether or not President Bhandari was accorded due pomp and respect an arrival at ICA.

“How can we analyse the accomplishment of the visit with a cool head if we have to work in the office?” asked one exiled servant rhetorically while soaring a torch rally on his way home along a dark alley. “We demand our rights to strike by during the President’s comings and goings.”

Meanwhile, the Office of the Air-Adviser General has announced a list of new holidays for the 2014 Tarse Calendar, including four days with extra significance like the peak of the Bohind Shower this Sunday. Any unforeseen act of shooting the Earth will also be commemorated with a nationwide (if not placid) shutdown.

All Super Naxals will be declared holidays retrospectively since it would take two full days for light from the Andromeda Galaxy to reach us. The activities of the sun and moon will be strictly monitored (since they appear on our national flag) so that any partial and/or total eclipses can be declared holiday.

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I AM Creta

Dr. Keyoor Gautam
Samyak Diagnostic

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