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PK and KP

Nepal's two largest communist parties were preparing to celebrate Russian revolutionary Vladimir Ilyich Lenin's birthday on 22 April like never before in Kathmandu this year.

UML and Maoists wanted to announce the birth of their unified party by organising a symbolic ceremony for unification. But Maoist Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal's insecurity about his own political future has made unification uncertain again.

Dahal says UML-Maoists will unite before mid May, but political analysts are skeptical. They say Dahal will not agree to unification unless he gets what he wants: UML Chair KP Oli's promise to handover the PM's chair and/or the unified party's leadership.

Political analyst Purnan Acharya says: "Dahal can sacrifice his political ideology but not his political future for this unification."

In 2016, Oli had refused to hand over the PM's chair to Dahal,

prompting the Maoists to team up with the NC to topple the UML government. Dahal is afraid that Oli might betray him again, so he wants to lead the unified party.

This is why Dahal is pushing for half the seats in the unified party. He might even compromise on 40% seats, which will give him enough strength to checkmate Oli, if needed. However, in addition to 40%, Dahal also wants Oli's promise to support him when the unified party's first General Convention takes place.

The UML has a well-organised structure, and its cadres do not like to see a Maoist as party Chair. Without Oli's support, Dahal cannot be elected even as General Secretary of the unified party, let alone President. But Oli's growing closeness with his internal arch-rival Madhav Nepal has made Dahal even more insecure.

Just like Dahal, Oli is also desperate for unification. Unless the Maoists unite with the UML, Oli will always have a sword

hanging over him. As in 2016, the Maoists can forge a coalition with the NC-Madhesi to oust Oli. It is difficult this time, given how big UML has become after last year's elections. But it is not impossible.

However, Acharya says: "If Oli gives in to Dahal, he will be unpopular within the UML. So, he wants unification, but on his own terms."

Political analyst Nilamber Acharya is hopeful that Oli and Dahal will be able to reconcile: "They do not have the luxury to part their ways," he says. "If they do, it will derail the newly-found political stability."

Om Astha Rai

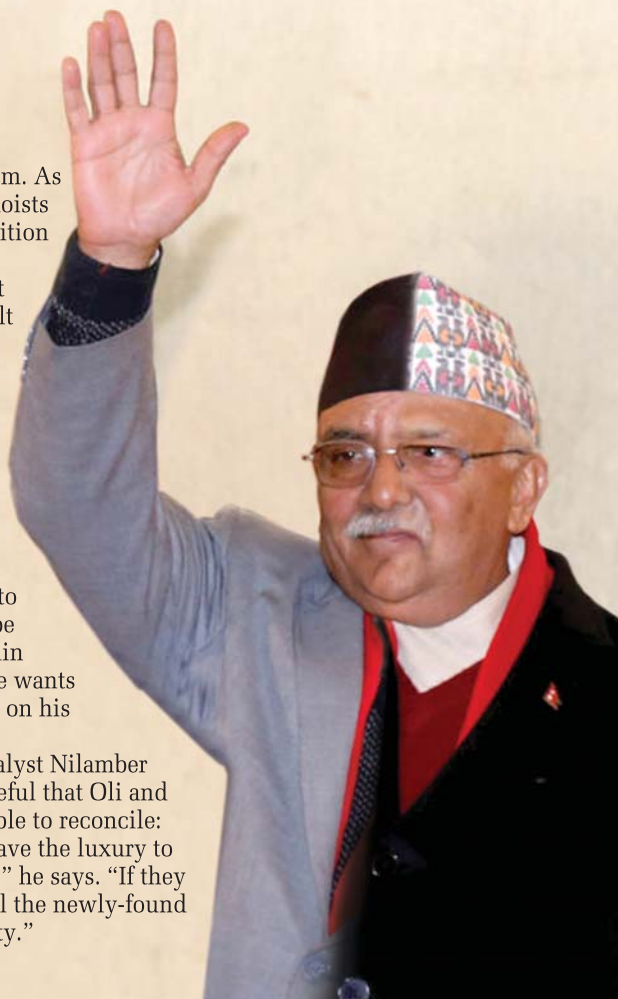


PHOTO MANIPULATION: KIRAN MAHARJAN

Nepal moves on 3 years later

Nepali Times brings special coverage on how survivors and communities are finally trying to put the trauma of the 2015 earthquake behind them, and build a new future.

Mind the gap

2015 was just a warning for us to be better prepared for the Really Big One

EDITORIAL

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All in the mind

Survivors try to overcome long-term psychological impact of the earthquake

PAGE 4-5



1/3 empty or 2/3 full?

Recovery expert says Nepal's reconstruction is not bad

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SUYOG PRAJAPATI

Past disasters foretold

Time to prepare western Nepal for a disaster that is sure to come

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Langtang lives

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Thamel gets back to business

PAGE 6

Bhaktapur's miracle baby turns 3

PAGE 7



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GOING PLACES TOGETHER

MIND THE GAP

Seismologists say that the 2015 disaster in Nepal was the most data-rich Himalayan earthquake ever studied. The 7.8 magnitude earthquake moved eastwards along a rupture zone from its epicentre in Gorkha, but mysteriously lost speed and intensity by the time it arrived in Kathmandu before fizzling out south of the Valley. Nearly all the 14 districts affected are east of Gorkha. The amplitude and the pulse ripples in the sediment of the Valley floor downed many monuments, but left most of the concrete buildings intact.

The 2015 earthquakes were an important warning for us to be better prepared for the really big one. Despite the tragic loss of 8,900 lives, Nepal got off relatively lightly three years ago for a quake of that magnitude. Lots of other factors kept the fatalities low: had it struck on a weekday many tens of thousands of school children would have been killed in the 8,000 schools that were badly damaged. Telecommunications did not go down, Kathmandu airport was back in operation within hours, and the highways remained passable.

Next time we may not be so lucky. As coverage in this special third anniversary edition of this newspaper points out (page 8-9) many of the badly-engineered ferrocement structures in Kathmandu will come down in the next big one. We will need specialised equipment and personnel trained in search, locate, rescue in collapsed concrete structures.

Newly-elected municipalities will have to ensure preparedness by stopping encroachment on urban open spaces, prepositioning water and digging

equipment, and have contingencies for telecommunications and transportation networks being knocked out.

This is not scaremongering. Seismologists predict two dangers we have to prepare ourselves for: one is the incomplete tension release after 2015 along faultlines below Kathmandu Valley. This could set off another quake below 8 magnitude in the next decades.

More worrying is the seismic gap in western Nepal where there hasn't been a mega-earthquake in the last 700 years (*see map*). Monastic records in Tibet allow us to

pinpoint the exact time of the last big earthquake there: 6AM on 1 June 1505. Estimated at 8.9, that earthquake devastated north India, destroyed Agra and other Moghul cities, may have trigged the Annapurna slope collapse that dammed the Seti River unleashing a tsunami when it

burst. Pokhara today sits on the debris field of that cataclysmic flood.

Himalayan seismologist Roger Bilham of Colorado University says there is now enough slip deficit beneath western Nepal that can trigger a sudden elastic rebound, moving the terrain southwards and upwards by a shocking 14m in seconds.

An earthquake of 8.5 magnitude epicentred in Surkhet, for instance, would not just destroy much of western Nepal, but also the densely packed cities of the Indo-Gangetic plains. This could conceivably be the greatest loss of life in a natural disaster in human history. The shaking would be intense enough to devastate Kathmandu as well.

As our coverage in this issue points out, it is now time to think beyond reconstruction in the 14 districts affected in 2015 to upgrading preparedness and disaster response in central and western Nepal. Buildings, especially schools and hospitals, need to be urgently retrofitted.

The Gorkha Earthquake three years ago was just a forewarning of an even bigger disaster to come.



GUEST EDITORIAL

JUN SAKUMA

Reconstruction and resilience

Being an earthquake-prone country as well, Japan understands very well its affects, consequences and difficulties in Nepal's recovery, which is why we have been giving utmost priority for support. The Government of Japan and JICA committed about 35 billion JPY (34 billion rupees) for reconstruction and have provided seamless support since the disaster.

Among our on-going activities, two major projects are housing and public school reconstruction. The Community Mobilisation Program (CMP) to promote collective reconstruction in Sindhupalchok and Gorkha has shown remarkable results: 83% reconstruction starting rate and 40% completion rate.

The rehabilitation of about 90 public schools has been completed, and 237 public secondary schools in six districts including Gorkha, Dhading and Lalitpur are ongoing. We are also supporting the reconstruction of other important public facilities such as Bir Hospital and Paropakar Maternity Hospital in Kathmandu, bridges on the Gorkha to BARPak road, etc.

Our support is not just limited to financial assistance, we also provide technical cooperation such as mason and inspection training for safer housing, or livelihood training for affected farmers – benefiting more than 13,000 people.

We have assigned two heritage restoration experts at the Department of Archaeology to support the rehabilitation of Kathmandu and Patan Durbar Square. We are also helping in strengthening DRRM (Disaster Risk Reduction Management) with support for areas such as hazard maps for Sindhupalchok and Gorkha, future damage estimation in future earthquakes in Kathmandu Valley, the Kathmandu Valley Resilience Plan, a 20-year

strategy for developing urban resilience, and municipality disaster recovery plans and guidelines.

I am frequently asked to evaluate the progress of reconstruction so far, and although some areas are predominantly slow-paced such as school reconstruction, the NRA and other related ministries have been working hard to achieve their missions. Reconstruction takes time since it is a process to strengthen resilience in future disasters. For instance, the reconstruction process is still going on after the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami which killed more than 15,000 people.

The responsibility for reconstruction does not rest solely upon the government. Every individual is a part of the process so that tasks are completed on time. Solidarity among the people must be strengthened and social resilience enhanced to expedite reconstruction before the memory of the disaster fades.

A strong government seems to be emerging in Nepal since last year's successful elections. As the objective of political stability is somewhat assured, this is a good sign for smoother reconstruction. I believe Nepal will soon overcome the damage of the earthquake, and accelerate its development. In this, the Government of Japan and JICA will continue to support the people and the Government of Nepal.



Jun Sakuma
is Chief Representative of JICA Nepal.

ONLINE PACKAGES



LANGTANG LIVES

Three years after the devastating earthquake that triggered a massive avalanche, people of Langtang are picking up the pieces and looking to the future once again. The trail has now been repaired and the tea houses along the trail are up and running, but tourism has yet to pick up. Join us on a video journey to Langtang. *Story: page 13.*



REBORN

Miracle baby Sonish Awal was pulled out from under the rubble after 22 hours. Watch this video of the Awal family three years later, recounting the horrors of the earthquake, and meet three-year-old Sonish. *Story on page 7* in this 3rd Anniversary Special issue in *Nepali Times*.



A QUAKE TOUR

Join Dutch architect Anne Feenstra and engineer Amshu Bhattacharya on an inspection walkabout of inner city Patan to learn about post-earthquake do's and don'ts. Find out why we are not prepared for the Next Big One. *Story: page 8-9.*

HIMALAYAN TEA

Finally, we are beginning to produce a world class product ('Champagne', Sikuma Rai, #904).

Abs Pan

NEPAL RAILWAY

A functioning rail system for Nepal would be wonderful ('India-Nepal rail diplomacy', Om Astha Rai, nepalitimes.com).

Sigmund Stengel

DARK AGES

This article is just a tip of an iceberg. ('How they kept Nepal in the dark ages', Ramesh Kumar, #904). Culprits must be punished. Sadly, we know political parties have shared the loot so it won't happen.

Jyoti Simha

■ Worst thing is, they went unpunished.
Sujit Shrestha

■ Let's drag them to court.
Bashu Shrestha

■ Powerful journalism. Media like yours is very much needed in Nepal.

Bikrant Regmi

■ What is the point if the guilty will never be punished?

Aashish Pokharel

ENEMY OF DEVELOPMENT

In Nepal the more rules you have, more rampant is the corruption. ('Why the private sector is spooked', Ramesh Kumar, #903).

Madhab Mathema

WHAT'S TRENDING



Shivani's Kathmandu

by *Duksangh Sherpa*
Go online to read last week's most-shared report on Shivani Singh Tharu and her new book, *Kathmandu Ma Ek Din*. Watch the video in which she talks about how she turned a successful modelling, television and radio career into a new foray into writing, and why her first book is a thriller novel.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

How Nepal's media landscape is being transformed

by *Madhu Acharya and Bhumiraj Chapagain*

Nepal's media landscape is undergoing massive changes rapidly, which may impact on governance and society. Over 4,000 respondents from 38 districts were surveyed by Sharecast Initiative to measure their ownership of communication devices, mass media consumption patterns, and their views on the press itself. Visit nepalitimes.com for revealing data and important takeaways in this most popular story of the week.

Most popular on Twitter

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QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
What is the main source of #information for most Nepalis and the one they trust the most? Is it #radio? #TV? #Online? #Print? Revealing data from @SharecastNP's Nepal #Media Landscape Survey 2018.

Jaya Luintel @luinteljaya
Congratulations to @Madhu2067 & @SharecastNP for bringing this great information out !

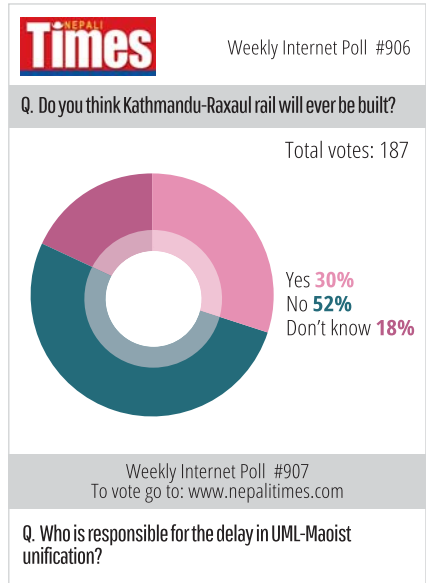
bharat koirala @ampuchhre Apr 14
I am glad radio is up there!

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
"Most people think of me as someone from the fashion field, and do not really associate me with literature, but those who have known me personally know that I've always been into writing and reading." For full video & story: <https://bit.ly/2GXQ0BR> Profile @duksangh@shivaniharu

Sonu @OJOS909
As a fan, I also know you are a good writer. Once, your drama based on virtual reality was awarded in an international competition.

Kunda Dixit @kundadixit
An 11th century Buddha, stolen 50 years ago, was returned to #Nepal by the @metmuseum in New York last week. Join @sahinashrestha of @nepalitimes on a video journey to the #Kathmandu neighbourhood and listen to what the priest has to say. <https://www.nepalitimes.com/here-now/bringing-our-gods-home/> ...

Ujwal Thapa @ujwalthapa
Thank you to all those involved in getting it back !



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A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER 

It’s all in the mind

The conflict and earthquake added to Nepal’s hidden epidemic of mental disorder

Sonia Awale

One-third of Nepalis were already suffering some form of psychiatric disorder, but mental health experts say the numbers went up significantly during the Maoist conflict and rose again after the 2015 earthquake. Besides existing psychological disorders in the general population, there are now torture victims, child soldiers, combatants with post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD), mistreated migrant workers, and lately earthquake survivors who had narrow escapes or lost family members. Arun Bhattarai was lying down for a nap that Saturday three years ago when a deep underground rumble followed by a big jolt woke him up. His house in Dhading collapsed, and his family became earthquake refugees in Kathmandu. Bhattarai, now 46, suffered from insomnia and anxiety attacks for months afterwards. The trauma drove him to drink, but today after treatment he has beaten his alcoholism. “A lot of people suffered from anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and depression following trauma and bereavement during the earthquake, some even attempted suicide,” says mental health specialist Kapil Dev Upadhyay. “The disaster

aggravated the psychosocial condition of many patients who were already recovering.” A survey of earthquake-affected districts of Rasuwa, Nuwakot and Makwanpur by the group Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation (TPO) showed that nearly 40% of respondents suffered from depression and anxiety for a year-and-half after the earthquake. Another 22% said they had suicidal thoughts, and a quarter had taken to drinking heavily. More women than men were affected by the symptoms (*see chart*). Sunita KC was out for a Saturday walk with her husband at Kathmandu Darbar Square when nearby monuments swayed and collapsed in clouds of dust. The 23-year-old was plagued with nightmares and lost the will to live. She got better after medication, but three years later her symptoms have returned. This week KC was in a clinic in Kathmandu with her family for consultation where she was diagnosed with severe depression. At the Psychiatric Department of Teaching Hospital, Rishav Koirala estimates that every family has at least one member afflicted with some form of mental illness after the earthquake. “In a way, the earthquake was a blessing in disguise because it raised public awareness about mental health and partially removed the stigma. The

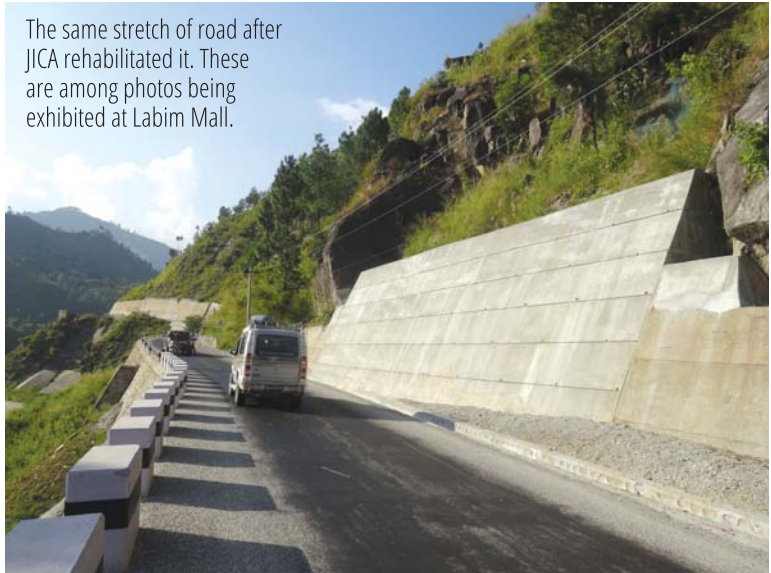
government was also forced to address mental healthcare.” Indeed, the government trained MBBS doctors to provide psychiatric help to survivors in the primary health care systems and district hospitals. Nepal’s Mental Health Policy, adopted in 1997 but rarely implemented, is finally being revised. At an international conference on mental health in Kathmandu in November, the government pledged to prioritise mental health, increase investment for a mental health focal unit in each provincial health ministry, and to recognise alcohol and substance abuse as mental health problems. “School level psychological education can help change societal attitudes towards mental disorders, and since Nepalis are resilient and family-oriented there is a support system,” says psychiatrist Namrata Pradhan at Model Hospital. Nepal has one of the lowest patients to psychiatrists ratios in the world. In addition, society has entrenched stigma about ‘mad’ people who are often ostracised, often by family members. Even before the earthquake, patients were left to fend for themselves. Rabi Shakya, professor of psychiatry at the Patan Academy of Health Sciences agrees that the public is more aware of mental disorders after the earthquake. “There has been a visible change in terms of awareness and general



MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL PROBLEMS
Gender and symptom breakdown of a 2017 survey of earthquake survivors in Rasuwa, Nuwakot and Makwanpur

TPO-NEPAL

Japan quake aid in pictures



PHOTOS: JICA

To mark the progress in building an earthquake resilient Nepal, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is holding a photo exhibition on the occasion of the third anniversary of the 2015 disaster. The exhibition will showcase 26 visuals of the work JICA has been carrying out for post-quake reconstruction, along with some before and after pictures of ongoing projects such as the Paropakar Maternity Hospital in Thapathali. “We want to share our achievements till date with the public and let them know that positive activities on reconstruction are happening steadily”, says Nanako Tsukahara, Program Formulation Advisor at JICA. Ironically, JICA was carrying out its ‘Assessment of Earthquake Disaster Risk for the Kathmandu Valley’ project when the 7.8 magnitude earthquake hit Central Nepal in April 2015. The agency immediately mobilised help for rehabilitation and recovery projects within a month of the quake. Within three years, JICA has already constructed 40% of its 54,443 target households and has repaired 184 classrooms of schools in three districts. It reconstructed the damaged Kathmandu-Bhaktapur road and the BP Highway, and constructed public infrastructure such as the District Agriculture Development Office in Sindhupalchok. “We made sure to involve the victims of the earthquake. So, we initiated the concept of community mobilisation programs and trained 2,157 masons, 894 engineers and 6,518 house owners for the purpose”, says Tsukahara. “We also conduct numerous community meetings and social trainings to build their capacity.” Besides infrastructure, JICA has also been focusing on livelihood enhancement projects through which 1,556 earthquake victims have already received farming and production skills. 🇳🇵

The exhibition will be up 20-23 April at the lobby of Labim Mall in Patan.

prabhu BANK

Growing GDP

Nepal is ranked highest among South Asian countries in the GDP growth with 7.5% in FY2017, showing steep recovery after the earthquake and Blockade. The country must create 240,000 jobs a year to maintain its employment rate which is expected to slow down to 4.6% in 2018, according to South Asia Economic Focus report by World Bank. However, growth in FY2018 will be 4.6% according to the Bank's twice-yearly Nepal Development Update. The main challenge will be managing fiscal and current account deficits.

Remittance up

The World Economic Outlook of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) shows Nepal's monthly remittance rose to an all-time high of \$680 million in March 2018. The reason is said to be an increase in bank deposits to almost 16%. However inflation rate also rose to the 6% in the same period, the IMF said.

Win flights

Turkish Airlines Kathmandu is offering a chance to win giveaways and a ticket to any

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Turkish Airlines destination to customers of its partners: Himalayan Java, Tranquility Spa and Chandragiri Hills through social media handles. The offer lasts till 14 May. (01) 4438363/4438436

Laxmi cardholders

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Qatar partnership

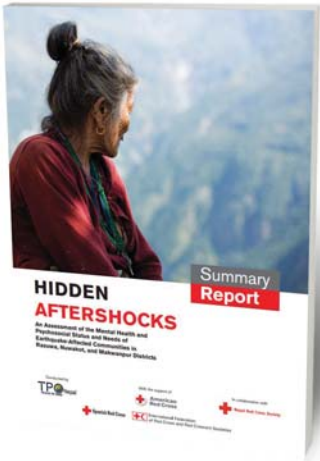
Qatar Airways hosted a lounge inside the Allianz E-Village to mark its recent partnership with ABB FIA Formula E Championship in Rome. The airline is the Official Airline Partner of the 2018 CBMM Niobium Rome E-Prix presented by Mercedes EQ on 14 April.

prabhu BANK



ROJITAADHIKARI

MEMORIES: Nani Maiya Prajapati was serving lunch to her husband, daughter, son-in law and two grandchildren when the earthquake struck three years ago. She survived, but the rest of her family did not. The 2015 tragedy left mental scars on thousands of survivors like her that will take time to heal.




Hidden Aftershocks

Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation (TPO) Nepal surveyed 510 participants in Rasuwa, Nuwakot and Makwanpur 18 months after the earthquake.

acceptance level regarding mental health, and as a result patients are coming out and seeking treatment,” he told *Nepali Times* this week.

Post-earthquake studies have shown higher rates of psychiatric disorders, but the major limitation is the lack of a baseline study. The Nepal Health Research Council is now preparing a nationwide mental health survey later this year to help develop a longterm plan to upgrade psychiatric care.

Says mental health activist and former patient Jagannath Lamichanne: “We need public awareness and acceptance so that people are comfortable with sharing their experiences, and that can be the most powerful tool for prevention.”  *Name of patients have been changed.*



Time heals

Immediately after the earthquake, there was a sudden surge of patients with mental disorders in Kathmandu’s psychiatric clinics.

But since 2016, records at the Nepal Mental Hospital and Bir Hospital show a sharp decrease in the number of patients with post-traumatic stress disorders. Doctors say the reason is that most patients with earthquake-related psychosocial issues received medication, counselling and support from families in the last three years.

Even so, some survivors still have anxiety attacks during an aftershock or when they hear loud noises. Pukar Gautam was a college student who found himself in the narrow alleys of Patan when the earthquake struck.

“I was terrified and took cover below a sturdy beam,” Gautam remembers. He was traumatised for months afterwards, and even today feels claustrophobic in narrow, crowded alleys.

Many traumatised children had to be counselled when schools reopened two months after the earthquake in 2015. They could not concentrate on their studies, had difficulty sleeping and looked distracted.

Niroj Mali is a teacher at Chantal Mauduit Academy in Taukhel, and remembers students were still in shock when they came back to school. Instead of regular classes he had the children sing, dance and watch cartoons. “They are doing well now, the earthquake seems like a bad dream,” Mali says.

Sandeep Bista, 32, works for the Red Cross and was trapped in a room in

Bhaisepati with a visiting aunt when the earthquake struck. He was treated for persistent anxiety, and feels much better now. But his aunt suffers relapses and has to regularly visit the district hospital in Ramechhap.

Chief Psychiatrist Lata Shrestha at the Nepal Mental Hospital confirms that the number of patients with psychological trauma has declined to levels before the earthquake. “I have seen more people now seeking psychological help and counselling for trauma and this is a positive side-effect of the earthquake,” she says.

Nawal Jha was posted to hospitals in earthquake affected districts and remembers treating many survivors with mental disorders. Younger patients who had seen much death and destruction were even suicidal, he remembers.

Purnima Lama was in a building in Bungamati and suffered a fracture when the house she was in collapsed. She needed medical treatment, but was reluctant to seek psychological counselling. “I was scared others would think I was mad,” she says, recalling how a relative was ostracised from her village in Dhading after she was mentally traumatised after a brother was killed during the conflict.

Psychiatrist Basu Dev Karki also says societal attitudes towards mental disorders are changing: “People now look at mental health at par with other medical conditions. That is a positive step in ensuring the mental wellbeing of the people.”

Some names have been altered.
Prabin Dhungel

To new beginnings and journeys.

Happy New Year 2075!

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Thamel gets back to business

Hari Bhakta Shrestha was in his office at Hotel Budget in Thamel when the earthquake struck just before noon on that fateful Saturday three years ago.

As the shaking got worse, he ran out along with other residents and once outside, watched as his own hotel tilted and collapse into the historic Ga Hiti stone water spout. There was a shattering roar, and a cloud of dust rose up in the air.

Six guests from Sikkim were inside having breakfast in their rooms, and did not make it out. Several women waiting to collect water at the bottom of the sunken spout also perished.

Shrestha's concentration then shifted from the rubble of the hotel to his family in Lazimpat. Fortunately they were all right.

"It took a little time for people to understand what was happening, everyone was in shock," Shrestha recalls. But three years later, he has rebuilt the renamed Hotel Ama's Home at the exact spot where his old one used to be. The community has come together to restore the Ga Hiti neighborhood, and it is difficult to imagine today that Kathmandu's tourist centre once suffered an earthquake.

"We cannot stop earthquakes, but we can protect ourselves from them by ensuring stronger construction for the next time," says Shrestha, who says he did not want to sell his land and move out. His patience paid off, and business is back to normal as Thamel's tourism revived.

After the earthquake, local politician Yogesh Bhattarai coordinated with the municipality and ward office to clear up the debris from the water spout, and lending a helping hand was the Ga Hiti Youth Club.

The Club's Zafar Hussain said since many monuments like Dharara and the Darbar Squares were destroyed there was no point waiting for help from the



NISCHAL PRADHAN

government, so the community got together to restore their own neighbourhood which took six months.

"Waiting was pointless, and if we had waited, this place would never have been restored," Hussain adds.

Called 'Operation Every Day Every Week' the rebuilding effort gathered momentum under Yogesh Bhattarai's coordination. Excavators got to work to clear the rubble, volunteers helped lift out debris from Ga Hiti. Every day members of community would work together, and at the end of the week, volunteers would join in -- diplomats, politicians and people from other neighbourhoods.

Finally, Kathmandu Metropolitan City took notice and formed a new reconstruction committee where the community put up 20% of the cost. With

BACK ON TRACK: Hotel Budget collapsed on top of Ga Hiti in Thamel during the earthquake (*below*) killing at least 10 people. Today, the neighbourhood has been rebuilt through a community effort led by Zafar Hussain and Hari Bhakta Shrestha (*above*).



OMASTHARAI

private donations, the hiti, road and broken water mains were all repaired long before similar reconstruction were completed in Kathmandu and elsewhere in the earthquake zones.

Shrestha gave the reconstruction of the neighbourhood more priority than rebuilding his own hotel. "We had no expectations of help from the government, and perhaps that is why it got finished so quickly," he adds.

Today, Ga Hiti is once more a place for the community to get together to collect water, wash clothes and even bathe.

Hussain owns a jewellery shop in Thamel, and says Ga Hiti is now a model for how much can be achieved collectively: "Even the elders were looking up to the younger generation this time, it showed that a co-operative society can function well in times of crisis."

Nischhal Pradhan, Raila Rai, Prasong Rupacha



पकाउने होइन, रमाउने हो अब

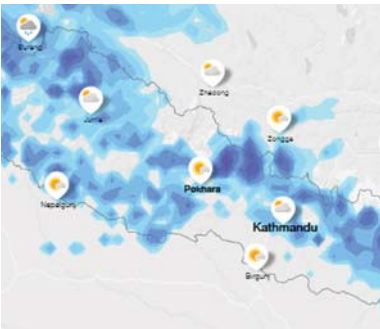
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Summer is now upon us in full force after spring dragged on for a bit longer than usual. The temperature is expected to climb to 30 Celsius for the first time this year over the weekend. The minimum temperature which had also stayed unseasonably low for the past month will climb to the low teens. All this is because of dry and hot air moving up from the plains. The lack of cloud cover will allow night temperatures to drop, while full sunshine will raise daytime temperature. There will be some stormy buildup over the mountains.

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Bhaktapur’s miracle boy at 3



MONIKA DEUPALA

Monika Deupala
in Bhaktapur

It was a warm Saturday morning three years ago when Rasmila Awal walked over to a nearby shop to buy provisions, leaving her four-month-old baby Sonish and 10-year-old daughter Sonia at home. The baby was asleep and Sonia was watching tv when the whole building started rattling and shaking.

Sonia remembers plaster falling from the ceiling and a big gash appearing on the walls. Instinctively, she ran out of the house, remembered she had left her little brother inside, rushed back in, picked up the baby and was trying to get out when it collapsed on top of them.

She tried to hold on to her little brother, but as the walls came down on top of her, she lost her grip on the baby and was knocked unconscious.

At the shop, Rasmila felt the ground swaying and knew immediately that it was an earthquake. She ran back, and crumpled on the ground when she saw her house in ruins with the two children inside.

“My feet were shaking, I

couldn’t get up, I wanted to scream for help, but no sound came out of my mouth,” Rasmila recalls. The neighbours immediately started digging, and soon saw a girl’s leg sticking out of the debris. Sonia was alive, but unconscious.

The rescuers dug some more but couldn’t find Sonish. The ground shook restlessly with aftershocks as night fell. Rasmila kept a silent vigil even after rescuers gave up the search, and neighbours prepared to sleep out in the open.

Just then, she heard a feeble wail from beneath the ruins. Army rescuers were called in, and after digging right through the night, they finally brought out Sonish, covered in dust but with barely a scratch on him. He had been under the rubble for 22 hours.

“I cannot describe that feeling of relief, I hugged him tight, all my prayers were answered,” remembers Rasmila. The baby started sucking his thumb, and looked around seemingly to ask what the fuss was all about.

Three years later, it is Sonish who runs to the door when he hears the bell ring. He is a playful and inquisitive boy, and is excited to have visitors. Rasmila’s husband is a truck driver and is out most of the day. The family

is still homeless, and live with the two children in one rented room. There is talk of land being appropriated to widen the road, so the house has not been rebuilt.

The Nepal Army, which helped in the rescue has given Sonish and Sonia scholarships till they go to college. After he finishes primary school, Sonish will attend the Army’s high school in Sallaghari.

Rasmila says the iconic photograph of Sonish by Amul Thapa (*see box, right*) brought the family fame, but not much else. However, she feels blessed: “At least I have both my children, and we are together.” 🇳🇵



Meet Rasmila Awal and her children Sonish and Sonia in this video in which she recalls the excruciating 22 hours after the earthquake three years ago. And finally the moment of pure joy when Sonish was brought out alive from the rubble.

nepalitimes.com



PAYIS.COM



BORN AGAIN: Rasmila Awal with her daughter Sonia and son Sonish in Bhaktapur this week (*left*).

Sonish and his mother with reporter Amul Thapa near the house where he was buried for 22 hours in a picture taken few months later (*above*).

Amul Thapa’s photo of Sonish in *Nepali Times* of 1 May 2015 (*left*).

Amul baby

Amul Thapa was in his newsroom in Baneswor when the building started shaking violently. His reporter’s instincts kicked in, and he grabbed his camera bag and rushed to Dharara where 60 people had been killed when the tower collapsed.

“Instead of taking pictures, we were helping rescue people from under the rubble,” Thapa recalls.

Only then did he decide to call home to find out how his family was doing in Bhaktapur. They told him about the great damage in the town, and how there was one house that had collapsed trapping children underneath the rubble.

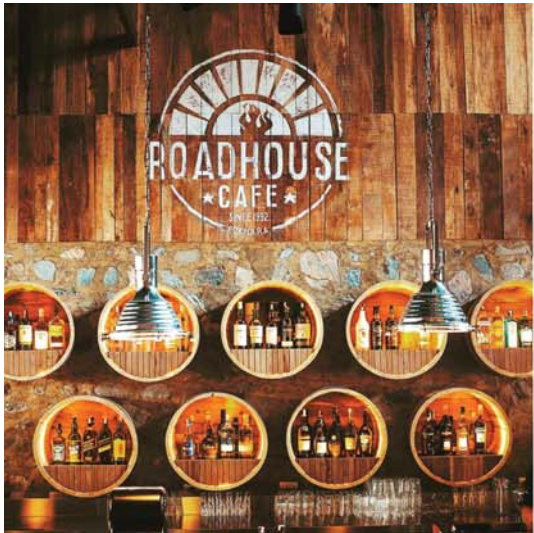
“The soldiers were digging frantically and the family was standing around weeping and praying. It didn’t feel right to be taking pictures, so I went home,” Thapa says.

Next morning, he went back to the collapsed house. The soldiers were still digging because they could hear the boy’s cries from beneath the debris. At about 10am, they found four-month-old Sonish Awal trapped underneath a wooden beam, which had actually protected him as the walls and floors collapsed all around.

Thapa clicked away: Rasmila’s tears of sorrow had turned into tears of joy, the baby was covered in dirt as he was extricated carefully from the rubble, and finally the now-famous photograph of rescue soldier Dipak Rai holding Sonish up amidst applause and relief which made it to the folding front page of *Nepali Times* and *Himal Khabarpatrika* that week (*above*).

Says Thapa: “I was able to tell the story of the child and the family to the whole world. My photographs made Sonish famous worldwide, and the story did the same for me. It was not just a picture, it symbolised hope and survival.”

Thapa often visits the family and helps in any way he can. He now works for *Naya Patrika*.



Om Astha Rai

Nepalis live in one of the most seismically active zones in the world. Nepal is number one in the list of top ten countries vulnerable to catastrophic earthquakes. But even the 2015 disaster will pale in comparison to a much bigger earthquake which scientists say threatens western Nepal.

Geologists are hesitant to predict when earthquakes will strike, they will only say it is going to happen one day and that we should be prepared.

But Himalayan seismologist Roger Bilham prefers to tell people to their face that the 2015 earthquake was not the Big One which scientists had feared. He says it is still collecting energy that could be let off in future.

Bilham and other seismologists say there are two dangers lurking beneath the Himalaya: one is the unfinished business of 2015, and the other is a looming megaquake in western Nepal.

Scientists agree that if a slip has already occurred in one section of the Himalaya, another earthquake of the same magnitude is unlikely to hit the same area for about 100 years – unless the energy has not been fully released.

The 2015 earthquake of 7.8 magnitude has been compared to a similar intensity quake that hit Kathmandu in 1833. That one also did not completely dissipate its energy, and sure enough another quake hit the Valley in 1866.

Bilham says that double whammy could be repeated. However, the second quake this time could cause more damage because its epicentre may be in faults directly beneath Kathmandu

Valley. Fingers crossed that the energy will release itself in a creep, and not a jolt.

The second scenario for western Nepal is even scarier. It could be the mother of all earthquakes because there hasn't been a megaquake in western Nepal since an estimated 8.4 quake struck in 1505.

Bijay Krishna Upadhyay of the National Society for Earthquake Technology (NSET-Nepal) says the western half of the country is at double risk because of the long seismic gap and relatively low awareness about earthquake safety.

After a relatively low intensity 6.8 magnitude earthquake epicentred in Udayapur killed nearly 700 people in Dharan and surrounding areas in 1988, it was easier for the government and organisations like NSET to convince people to build earthquake-resistant houses in eastern Nepal.

“We now need to shift our attention not just to western Nepal but the entire country while continuing with reconstruction in the earthquake-affected districts,” says Upadhyay.

A campaign to spread awareness about earthquake safety had been started in western Nepal after a 6.4 magnitude earthquake killed 180 people in and around Bajhang district in 1980. But the focus shifted to eastern Nepal after the Dharan tragedy.

However, in the last three years the focus has once more gone to the 14 districts of Central Nepal hit by the 2015 earthquake.

As a result, the western part of the country which scientists consider the most vulnerable is not prepared at all for an earthquake that is sure to hit one day.

Ajaya Dixit, author of a recent book on disaster preparedness (*Nepalma Bipad*), says: “Our response to the 2015 earthquake has largely focused on rebuilding damaged houses, and we have not looked at disasters in their entirety to prevent systemic vulnerability from reproducing itself elsewhere.”

One government official who has been harping on retrofitting buildings all over Nepal after the 2015 earthquake is Govind Raj



Past disa



How prepared are

Nepali Times takes architects on an inspection walkabout of inner city Patan

Sashi Shrestha

As they walk along the dark, narrow alleys Dutch architect Anne Feenstra and structural engineer Amshu Bhattarai, are shocked. Despite the warning of the 2015 earthquake, much of the new construction flouts basic architectural codes and

engineering features.

The two stroll from one densely-packed town square to the next, and their expert eyes spot structural faults and vulnerabilities in buildings in which there are multiple families living in partitioned flats. Some have concrete floor additions on top of old brick mud walls, others have cantilevered rooms jutting out and



RISK ASSESSMENT: Dutch architect Anne Feenstra (*left*) explains how Malla-era buildings in Kathmandu had in-built flexibility to withstand earthquakes, which later structures do not have.

Two post-earthquake constructions with dangerous top-heavy cantilever balconies lean on each other in Patan (*far left*).

The ground floor brick and mortar load-bearing wall of an old building supports ferrocement floor additions (*right*).

Disasters foretold

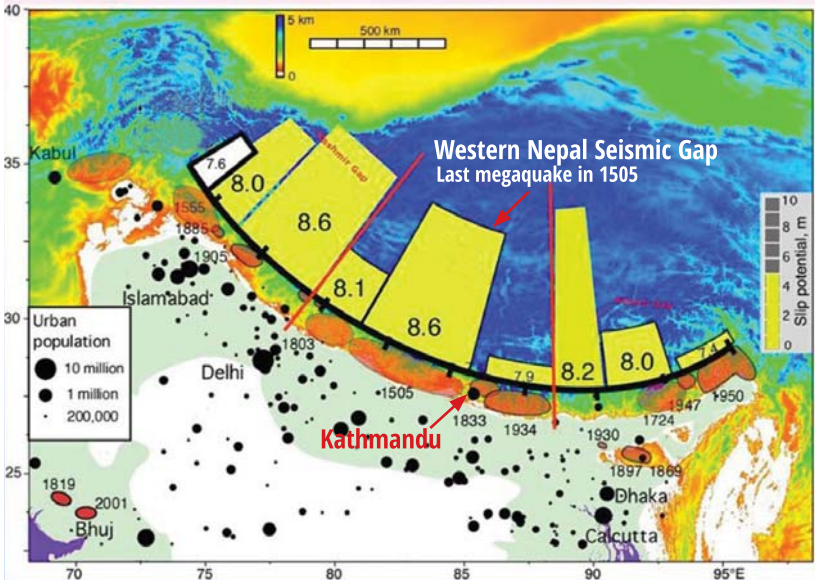
Preparing western Nepal for a future megaquake is now even more urgent than reconstruction in areas hit by the 2015 disaster



YUBARAJ SHRESTHA

Himalayan seismic gaps

What makes Mt Machapuchre (6990m) such a stunning peak (*left*) is also what makes it dangerous. Central and western Nepal have not suffered a megaquake for 700 years. Map below shows potential future intensity of earthquakes and slip in metres based on estimate of stored tectonic pressure along the Himalayan arc.



Pokhrel, the former CEO of the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA). He proposed training on reinforced masonry all over the country, including the west, to ease the shortage of skilled bricklayers in the districts hit in 2015.

“It could have helped technology transfer. After building houses in the earthquake-affected districts, they could have returned to their own villages in western Nepal and inspired others to build earthquake-resistant houses,” he explains.

But the NRA bureaucracy and donors prefer to focus on a disaster that has already happened instead of one that has not struck yet. Pokhrel himself resigned to contest elections, and his proposal was shelved.

One silver lining is that after last year’s local and provincial polls, enforcing building codes are now mandatory in municipalities and villages across the country. Local governments will be the best place to implement this requirement, and some provincial governments have already prioritised disaster preparedness in their first plans and policies.

In Province 4, Chief Minister Prithvi Subba Gurung has decided

to set up an emergency relief fund, and promises to strictly implement the building code in Pokhara and other towns to prepare his region for future shock.

“Nepalis tend to forget a tragedy very quickly, but our provincial government will never forget the lessons learnt from the 2015 earthquake,” Gurung told us.

However good plans and policies sound, in Nepal the proof of the pudding is always in the implementation. Kathmandu has an excellent building code, for example, but it has been flagrantly flouted (*see page 11*) leading to the loss of lives in 2015.

Dixit says awareness about disaster preparedness among local governments and the new national Disaster Management Act that focuses on preparedness are encouraging. But, he adds: “Major limitations exist: low institutional capacity, lack of financial and other resources, skill sets and equipment.” 🇳🇵

 nepalitimes.com

Watch video and animation of Nepal Earthquake 2015 by Robert Butler, University of Portland

Are we ready for the next big one?

overhanging the street below.

“Here, in this one, the lesson is never to copy and paste,” says Feenstra, pointing to a Rana era home with its walls and windows severely out of alignment.

Malla period traditional builders interlocked the timber and stones to create flexible but strong earthquake resistant structures. Feenstra explains that the Ran

were more interested in external stucco decoration and not strength, which is why a disproportionate number of Rana-era buildings were damaged three years ago.

Although most of the houses that collapsed in Kathmandu in 2015 had load-bearing walls with brick-and-mortar masonry, a slightly stronger earthquake that

had lasted longer with higher amplitude of shaking would have brought down many concrete pillar buildings as well.

Amshu Bhattarai is with the Department of Urban Development and Building Construction (DUDBC) and says the fact that cement buildings survived has given people a false belief that they are stronger.

“Some of the concrete pillar buildings like this one here are constructed with just four beams in each corner, this can have disastrous consequences in case of a future bigger earthquake,” Bhattarai explains, pointing to a new building coming up near Mangal Bazar.

Lack of urban planning, flouting of building codes, and poor quality construction materials plagued structural safety in Kathmandu Valley even before the earthquake.

But three years later, it looks like residents have got over the initial shock of the quake, and have forgotten about safety again. It does not help that the municipal bureaucracy, lack of trained construction workers, and little

awareness in the public have made it easy to flout safety codes.

Sharing his field experience from Nuwakot and Kathmandu, Bhattarai explains: “Most people don’t know that in order to qualify for compensation, they must work with a government certified contractor or engineer to rebuild their houses, otherwise they won’t be eligible for the compensation even if they have already built their homes.”

That knowledge gap extends to technicians and building contractors as well. Many builders fail to abide by construction guidelines and have improper joints, don’t insert enough iron rods to give beams and columns required strength, do not mix cement in the proper way, and do not allow enough time for curing.

Population pressure due to rampant urbanisation, greed of flat-owners and the need to cut costs may turn most of old Kathmandu Valley structures into death traps in the next big earthquake.

“This is actually very badly mixed concrete, it is too sandy and does not even bind well together,” says Feenstra, pointing out a

poorly patched wall, with chunks of cement falling off.

As the architects exit a narrow alley, they come across a man praying at a roadside shrine, rubbing vermilion on his door frame to protect his home which was badly damaged in the 2015 quake and still propped up by timber beams.

Asks Feenstra: “If you have a chance to create a safe home for your family, would you do many pujas or would you rather talk to a structural engineer?” 🇳🇵



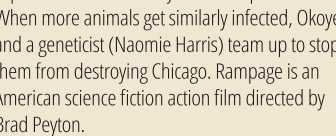
PHOTOS: ASMITA NEPAL



Join Dutch architect Anne Feenstra and Amshu Bhattarai of the DUDBC for a different kind of tour of inner city Patan to learn about post-earthquake do's and don'ts.

nepalitimes.com 

GETAWAY

**KATHMANDU, 13 - 19 April**

Earthquake doesn't kill people, corruption does

Himal Khabarpatrika, 15-21 April

हिमाल
खबरपत्रिका

The April 2015 earthquake not only flattened mud-mortar houses but it also destroyed some seemingly sturdy concrete buildings in parts of Kathmandu Valley.

The disaster jolted the government out of deep slumber, and the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development decided to investigate how the Building Code was flouted to create dangerously weak ferrocement structures. The Ministry also vowed to take action against those involved in building and giving permission to violate the design code.

Three years later, with the memory of the earthquake fading, the government has forgotten

what it promised. There has been no investigation. No action against the culprits. In fact, buildings are being reconstructed where previous ones were destroyed that still violate the code. This is hardly surprising given how unscrupulous builders and businessmen are, and how much impunity they have enjoyed over the last two decades. A top bureaucrat admits bluntly: "Who do we take action against? Everyone has political connections."

Until the end of absolute monarchy in 1990, only a few had access to Kathmandu's corridors of power. Democracy was supposed to give people a say and make rulers accountable, but it ended up fostering political protection for the real estate and building mafia.

An ex-secretary told us: "I do not regret the restoration of democracy, but the truth is impunity has

proliferated after 1990."

In their book *Society and Corruption*, ex-CIAA Chief Suryanath Upadhyaya and researcher Dipesh Ghimire claim that nearly half the houses built in the Valley have not complied with the Building Code. Engineers confirm that most of the houses that collapsed during the April 2015 earthquake were built without proper design, and with poor quality construction material.

A 2015 damage assessment of reinforced concrete buildings of Kathmandu Valley says 40% constructional materials do not meet the required quality standards. Structural engineer Rajan Suwal puts it this way: "Violation of the Building Code and the use of sub-standard construction materials are a killer combination." Yet, no house that flouts the Building

Code has ever been demolished. Builders and owners often get away by simply bribing officials.

Two decades ago, when he was a young and idealistic government engineer, Buddhi Sagar Thapa had tried to demolish Suraj Arcade, the business complex in Hanuman Dhoka that did not comply with the Building Code. But his team was cornered by local goons in the pay of the Arcade's owner. He sought police protection, but there was no response. He then called his boss, who told him to "just leave it". Bhai Kaji Tiwari, Chief of the Kathmandu Valley Development Authority, says: "If those involved in violating the Building Code are punished, no one will dare to violate it. But since no one is punished, everyone knows they can get away with it."

Rameshwar Bohara

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Call Me By Your Name

What can I say about Luca Guadagnino's *Call Me By Your Name* without being accused of sounding hopelessly enamoured of this most true and tender of love stories? To get the particulars out of the way and move on to the dreamy stuff of the film itself, *Call Me By Your Name* was adapted by the great James Ivory from a novel by André Aciman, and



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

while Ivory deserves a column to himself for the wonderful films he's written and directed, *A Room With A View* (1986) and *Remains of the Day* (1993) being among my most treasured period films, I must move on from my lingering nostalgia for these lusciously orchestrated, exquisitely crafted films.

Nominated as one of the nine

films in the Best Picture category this year (it lost to *The Shape of Water*), Guadagnino's observant, funny, warm, audaciously intellectual and sensual film is about a relationship between two young men, the seventeen year old Elio (Timothée Chalamet), and a young American graduate student, Oliver (Armie Hammer), who comes to stay with Elio's parents and help his cerebral archaeologist father in a small town in northern Italy.

Most films are successful because their scripts are strong, here the film has the added benefit (in addition to Ivory's dazzling, almost virtuoso writing) of being shot in keeping with the actual sequence of events (as opposed to a schedule that prioritises the proximity and availability of locations), and on a single 35mm lens that allows for wide shots that enable the actors to roam outside the usual constraints, allowing for an

ease and spontaneity that can sometimes be absent from more traditional set-ups.

While a film like Paul Thomas Anderson's *Phantom Thread* benefits from such structure, *Call Me By Your Name* thrives and comes alive under this kind of direction, giving the viewer a sense of closely getting to know the characters as they move through their sun-drenched idyllic lives, that is, until both Elio and Oliver fall helplessly in love with each other against their own better judgement.

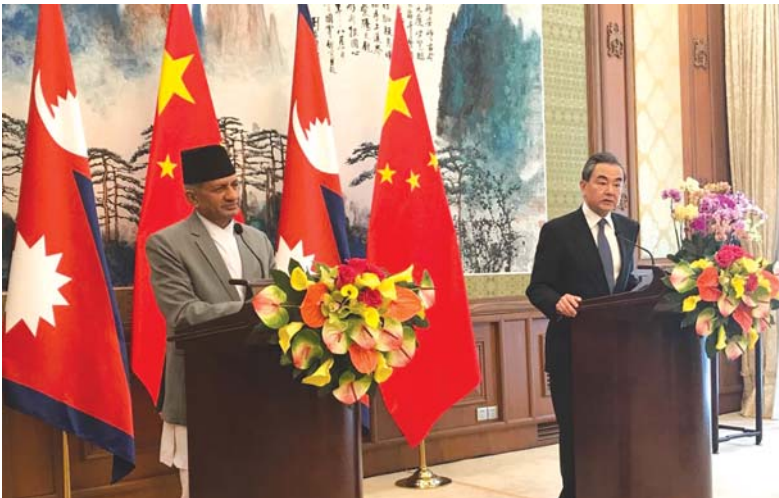
This is not the usual, cloying 'coming of age' film where Elio enters into a rite of passage that opens the doorway into his adulthood, it is instead an exploration of what it means to fall deeply in love, and all the uncertainties, bliss, heartache, and glory that surrounds this mind-altering human act. While the film is indeed the unforgettable story of Elio and Oliver, it is supported by an indescribably fine supporting cast including a gentle, wise performance by Michael Stuhlbard as Elio's erudite father Mr. Perlman, and the gorgeous Amira Casar as his brilliant, stunning, compassionate mother, Annella.

Call Me By Your Name like all genuine works of art, is a story that is not bound by the gender of its protagonists, though it is defined in some ways by the luscious depictions of the Italian countryside. One could argue that few films go wrong in such a setting, but that kind of negativity is for the small of heart.



Watch trailer online

nepalitimes.com



MoFA

RED NATIONS: Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi at a press conference following a bilateral meeting in Beijing on Wednesday. Gyawali is expected to work on effective implementation of past commitments with China, including the Trade and Transit Agreement.



EMBASSY OF INDIA/ TWITTER

BRAVE SOUL: Indian Ambassador to Nepal Manjeev Singh Puri lays a wreath at the tomb of Begum Hazrat Mahal, who stood up to the British in India in 1857, at Jame Masjid in Kathmandu to commemorate her 139th death anniversary in Kathmandu on Thursday.



GERMAN EMBASSY, KATHMANDU

HELPING HANDS: German Ambassador to Nepal Roland Schäfer (*second from left*) with officials from Province 3 inaugurate a water supply system for the German Technical Foundation in Dhading on Wednesday.



MEGA BANK

WOW WOMAN: Chairperson of Mega Bank Bhoj Bahadur Shah congratulates newly appointed CEO Anupama Khunjeli in Kathmandu on Wednesday. Khunjeli is the first female CEO of a commercial bank in Nepal.



SHANKAR GROUP

BEAUTIFUL BOSNIA: Minister of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation Rabinendra Adhikari and Bhawani Rana, president of FNCCI during a photo exhibition to celebrate the natural, cultural and historical heritage of Bosnia & Herzegovina in Jhamsikhel on Monday.

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The reincarnation of a holy valley

For the first time since 2015, Langtang’s survivors marked new year and a new beginning

Clara Bullock
in Langtang

Trekking guide Sangbu Lama was on his way to Kathmandu to take his children back to boarding school in the city. He was on the road when the earth started shaking. First information was that Kathmandu had been destroyed, but as the hours went by Sangbu found out that it was his own hometown of Langtang that had been wiped off the map. More than 200 people including villagers and trekkers were killed within seconds at almost exactly noon on 25 April 2015. The quake had triggered a massive avalanche that swept the Langtang Glacier onto the village below. Most people, their homes and livestock were blown away to the other side of the valley by the shock wave that preceded the falling ice and rocks. The village today lies buried under 100m of debris.

“I am certain that if I had been home, my family and I would not have survived,” says Sangbu in a subdued voice, “I don’t know if you can call it luck. I lost cousins and friends. But me and my children are still alive.”

Three years later, there are signs that the people of Langtang are picking up the pieces and looking to the future once again. Many think they have been punished by the gods for being too materialistic, forgetting their dharma. The ghosts of those who perished seem to whisper in the afternoon wind sighing through the junipers, and among the fluttering prayer flags.

Like Sangbu, all survivors have stories of close calls. Some had gone up the valley to herd their yaks, others were visiting relatives in Kyanjin or Kathmandu. A few were miraculously spared when they ducked behind rocks just before the air blast blew away everything else. Everyone here has lost someone.



SURVIVAL TALES: Sangbu Lama and his children were saved because they were on their way to Kathmandu when the avalanche destroyed Langtang. He is now back in his village to help rebuild (*right*).

Karsom Tamang and her son Thindup, who broke both legs in the avalanche, pose in front of their rebuilt lodge (*left*). Her two daughters study in Kathmandu.

Rescuers in Langtang a week after the earthquake triggered an avalanche killing more than 200 villagers and tourists three years ago (*below*). Langtang today has been relocated to higher ground (*big picture*).



Last month, for the first time since 2015, the people of Langtang marked their new year. They seem to be ready to move on and build a new future in their *beyul*, holy valley.

Sangbu says: “This year we will try to forget the past and focus on our own lives. This new year is going to be a fresh start for us.”

However, tourism hasn’t really picked up in the Langtang National Park after the earthquake despite an international plea to help Nepal recover by visiting the country. The trail has now been repaired, the tea houses along the trail are up and running, yet there are only about 30 trekkers per day this season, down from about 130 daily before the quake.

After the earthquake, many Langtang survivors were evacuated by helicopter to a monastery in Kathmandu. The families were trained in baking and hotel management so they could make a living from tourism when they got back. Many invested in rebuilding their lodges.

“I am too old to get new job training. I will have to keep working in the tourism business,”

says Sangbu. Other families cannot even grow crops because their land was buried by the avalanche. Today, they are completely dependent on expensive supplies from outside.

Up the trail from Langtang is Kyanjin, which was not as badly affected, but even here everyone has a family member who was killed. Members of the Tamang family were hurt and brought to a hospital in Kathmandu, but today Karsom Tamang has recovered. Her two daughters are in school in Kathmandu and her son Thindup, who had broken both legs, is living in Kyanjin with her mother and aunt.

Despite everything that has happened and the loss of livelihoods, there seems to be a new determination to help others. Kyanjin got its first home for care of the elderly who lost sons and daughters in the earthquake, and have no one to look after them.

Says Sangbu: “I am focusing on myself now, but we also have to keep our culture and traditions alive and try not to dwell too much on the horrors of the past, and plan for the future.”



Dairy heritage

Aside from its stunning scenery, Langtang is famous for its yak cheese factory. Built by Swiss geologist Toni Hagen nearly 70 years ago, the plant was destroyed in the earthquake. The factory already faced a threat to its existence because of the decreasing number of yak herders and the out-migration of the young people.

Nepali yak cheese from Langtang is almost as famous among trekkers as the Swiss Emmental. So, the community came together to preserve this dairy heritage to rebuild it. Various charities have provided help to donate two yaks to every family in the village so they can produce the milk needed to make cheese.

But even with this help, cheese production will only be 20% of what it was before the earthquake. That is why Gyalbo Tamang, chief of the renovated cheese plant (*pictured, above*), is looking to expand his production by June with upgraded equipment. Cheese production will begin right after the yaks return to Kyanjin from the high pastures, and will be sold to tourists in the town or sent down to selected stores in Kathmandu.



Go online to join us on a journey to Langtang, and see how the sacred valley is picking up the pieces after the tragic loss of life and livelihoods three years ago. Listen to the villagers and their hopes for the future.

nepalitimes.com



Caritas Nepal

Serving earthquake affected Nepali people and communities for recovery and reconstruction

Caritas Nepal has an encouraging story to tell on earthquake recovery and reconstruction. Caritas Nepal has strengthened the social spirit present in Nepali people and communities to work together for common good. Accordingly, local communities are working together to pursue earthquake recovery and reconstruction by applying build back better techniques. The major earthquake events occurred in April 25 and May 12 of 2015, and Caritas Nepal is implementing integrated programmes to facilitate holistic recovery in 16 earthquake affected locations.

The locations supported are: (a) Orang, Bulung of Bigu Gaupalika (rural municipality) and ward no. 6 & 7 of Sailung Gaupalika of Dolakha district; (b) Kalika, Thokarpa, Sunkhani, Yamunadanda of Sunkoshi Gaupalika of Sindhupalchowk district; (c) Balthali of Panauti Nagarpalika, Chandenimandan of Mandandeupur Gaupalika, ward no.1,2,3 of Chaurideurali Gaupalika of Kavrepalanchowk district; (d) Baseswar of Golanjor Gaupalika and ward no. 1 of Hariharpur Gadhi Gaupalika of Sindhuli district; and (e) Gorkha Nagarpalika of Gorkha district.

Titles of Caritas Nepal's programmes whose achievements are presented here are Nepal Earthquake Recovery Programme and Gorkha Earthquake Recovery Resilience Programme.



Bulung, Bigu-3, Dolakha.

Caritas Nepal - House construction status in full shelter package supported six locations

Houses fully constructed	2,888
House construction initiated	4,440
Households enrolled	4,680

Note: The National Reconstruction Authority listed total households in the six locations are 4769, and out of this 4680 households have been enrolled.

Shelter Sector Achievement

Caritas Nepal is facilitating 'Surakshit Awas Afain Banau Aviyaan' or 'let us build earthquake resistant houses ourselves campaign'. Caritas Nepal is providing full shelter package support in six locations (see noted below). The full shelter support package includes housing grants (Rs. 300,000/- each) and social mobilisation and technical support. In full shelter support package supported locations, 2888 households have already built earthquake resistant houses. That is 62% of enrolled households in the locations have already completed earthquake resistant house construction. They have built mainly stone mud masonry or brick cement masonry types of houses. In addition to this, 1552 households (33%) have initiated house construction. That is 95% of the 4680 enrolled households in the selected six locations (see below) have either initiated construction or already completed earthquake resistant



Thakmaya Acharya in front of her newly built house (right) and her damaged house in Bulung, Dolakha.

house construction.

House construction status in full shelter package supported locations are as follows: Orang – 548 houses constructed (or 97% of the enrolled households of the village have constructed houses already), Bulung – 600 houses constructed (79%), Kalika – 435 houses constructed (66%), Thokarpa – 614 houses constructed (52%), Balthali – 241 houses constructed (44%), Chandenimandan – 450 houses constructed (42%).

Caritas Nepal will look into approved grievances by National Reconstruction Authority in the future and will support a total of 4825 households with full shelter package support. Caritas Nepal is working with the community members to announce Orang and Bulung villages of Bigu Gaupalika in Dolakha as having reached full house construction status in near future.

The house construction effort is being led by masons trained by Caritas Nepal. This includes 1341 number of

practicing masons that were trained on earthquake resistant construction (7 days training), and 192 people trained in fifty days training to become masons. 86% of these trained masons are working full time and are leading the house re-construction effort in nine locations.

8300 households were provided individual level technical assistance for house construction (i.e. for design, cost, lay out, construction supervision, and reporting to local government and NRA) in

twelve locations.

250 shelter groups have facilitated shelter reconstruction work resulting in families accessing material and human resources in a planned manner. Many of the families in the communities have shared labour as per traditional practice to help each other construct houses.

Caritas Nepal has constructed 18 model houses using locally available materials, out of these 12 model houses

were provided to most vulnerable families of the villages. For example, Mr. Sarkiman Tamang and his 14 year old son were provided a model house in Chandenimandan (Mandandeupur, Kavrepalanchowk). The remaining six model houses built in Gorkha Municipality were provided for community's purposes. There has been good replication of these model houses in the communities and people have copied the important earthquake resistant features of the model houses.

Water and Sanitation

By March of 2018, a total of 2467 earthquake affected households (12335 people) had improved access to safe drinking water from 49 drinking water systems constructed by the local User Groups with the financial and technical support of Caritas Nepal. The local User Groups have contributed about 30-40% of the cost of the systems by transporting materials and undertaking labour work etc. The User Groups themselves managed the construction of the drinking water systems.



Sunkoshi-3, Sindhupalchowk.

Livelihood and DRR

10,000 households have been trained in livelihood recovery concerns and were provided inputs, and they are re-establishing and improving their livelihoods. The livelihoods pursued are in the sectors of agriculture, livestock raising, poultry raising etc.

8 cooperatives have been strengthened and they are providing micro-finance services to 6047 households. Soft loans are being provided by the cooperatives to their members to help them pursue economic recovery activities.

Disaster mainstreaming has been done in all intervention sectors, local disaster management committees have been formed in eight locations, and plans (LDRMP) prepared in two locations.



Mr. Somlal Tamang and his wife, Balthali, Panauti-11, Kavrepalanchowk.

Protection and Psychosocial

Caritas Nepal has implemented the programmes by doing its best to ensure safe, dignified and accessible service delivery to the targeted households. 96 disabled people have been helped to register with local government and District Women and Children's Office so they can benefit from the related support programmes of Nepal Government. 225 people suffering from psychosocial trauma were provided funds to access medication (i. e. referral support).

Caritas Nepal was established in 1990 by the Catholic Community in Nepal with a mission to provide humanitarian and social development services in Nepal. Contact address: Caritas Nepal, Dhobighat, Lalitpur, Nepal. GPO Box- 9571 Kathmandu, Nepal. Phone: 5538172, 5539344. Email: info@caritas.org.np Website: www.caritasnepal.org

Some examples of families who have built earthquake resistant houses



MASTER SANJAY TAMANG

(Orang, Bigu-2 Dolakha) who lost his parents due to earthquake now has an earthquake resistant stone mud masonry house to live in. He is living with his grandparents. His grandmother says that she and Sanjay are glad to have constructed a new house. Though much impacted by the family's great loss due to earthquake, they are hopeful about the future. Sanjay is in grade four in a nearby school.



MRS. SWOSTIKA KHATRI (Orang, Bigu-2 Dolakha) took part in a mason training provided by Caritas Nepal and has worked with her team to construct more than 25 houses. She developed confidence to work effectively as a mason after the training and is glad to have contributed to house re-construction effort in her village. She and her team are even thinking of going to a nearby village to work as masons since re-construction effort is now nearing completion in Orang village.



MR. CHANKEY TAMANG (Bulung, Bigu-3 of Dolakha) is glad to have constructed a stone mud masonry house. Though having disability concerns he is proud that he was among the first persons to re-build a house in his neighbourhood.



MRS. ANITA MAJHI and **MR. BHAMI MAJHI** are of Chandenimandan (of Mandandeupur-10 of Kavrepalanchowk district) and they have constructed earthquake resistant brick cement masonry houses. The Majhis in the location helped each other to construct houses by doing labour sharing.



MS. MAYAKANCHI TAMANG has built a new earthquake resistant stone mud masonry house in Chaap of Balthali (Panauti-11 of Kavrepalanchowk). She is a single woman who is taking care of her family of four people.



1/3 empty or 2/3 full?

Nigel Fisher

If I hear one more commentator saying 'nothing is happening' on the post-earthquake reconstruction front, I will scream. With the third anniversary upon us, observers and media from near and far, in their infinite wisdom, will be pronouncing that progress is minimal and looking for examples to prove their foregone conclusion.

So, which of the following stories do you prefer?

Either: After three years, the community of Semphreng Gopte Gyang (Helambu Gaunpalika-6 in Sindhupalchok) and its 65 primary school students still do not know when help will come to rebuild their shattered four-room school.

Or: In the village of Bati Banjyang in Sindhupalchok, at least 10 houses are under construction or completed, following the building code. Community members are helping each other, while masons and workers have come from as far away as the Tarai for the jobs.

Take your pick. Both accurately represents community life three years after the April and May 2015 earthquakes. Many houses, schools, health centres, heritage and local government buildings remain to be rebuilt or retrofitted. The most disadvantaged are struggling: to earn a living, to get their children into school, let alone take advantage of government support to acquire land, so that they can actually build a house of their own.

But 'nothing is happening'? Come on.

Here are a few statistics even though your eyes may be starting to glaze over already: as evidence of the 'slow pace' of reconstruction, a recent news report quoted the NRA's data that the reconstruction

Even in developed countries, recovery and reconstruction takes much more than three years to complete



RSS

of 2,371 schools destroyed or damaged by the earthquakes of 2015 has yet to begin.

Of course, in every community where rebuilding has not started, parents worry continuously about the educational future of their children. This is the downside, and they are right to want schools functioning in their communities again as soon as possible.

On the other hand, out of a total of 7,553 destroyed or damaged schools, 3,079 (41%) have been rebuilt and another 2,013 (28%) are under construction. That is striking by any standard.

Compared with progress in many disaster recovery situations around the world, this is not unimpressive, to say the least. Yes, reconstruction of 31% of schools has yet to begin, but 69% are either rebuilt or under construction: is this a slow pace? Is the bottle one-third empty or two-thirds full?

Over the last year

especially, progress has accelerated, much of it with government support, but also with many householders and communities raising their own resources.

Look at housing: NRA data shows that in late May 2017, construction had started on 43,500 houses, while almost 27,000 had been completed. Eleven months later, construction has begun on 403,600 houses and 115,000 have been finished. That's an impressive increase of well over 900% in housing starts and more than 400% in completed houses, in an 11-month period. Health centres, heritage buildings, rural trails and bridges, government buildings – whatever we look at, we are seeing progress.

Yes, many people and communities have not yet started to rebuild their houses and schools, or are struggling to put together the resources. The struggle is particularly acute for

the most vulnerable members of the population.

There are problems regarding compliance with building codes, and unresolved differences on how to rebuild heritage structures (*see article below*).

But look at all the rebuilding that is going on now, from the remote communities of Sindhupalchok, Gorkha or Ramechhap to the buzz of reconstruction activity (with those strikingly symmetric scaffoldings) on temples in Patan Durbar Square.

Nowhere in the world has recovery and reconstruction been completed or neared completion after only three years -- it just doesn't happen. Be it the Great Hanshin (Kobe) earthquake in 1995, Hurricane Katrina in 2005, or the Haiti earthquake of 2010, it takes close to a decade to rebuild and there is still residual evidence of damage in some places. Christchurch is still struggling to recover seven years after the earthquake that devastated it. Experience shows that on

average, it takes close to a decade to rebuild from such major disasters - and even after that, there is usually still residual evidence of damage in some places.

Japan, the US and New Zealand have well-developed infrastructure, local government networks and urban planning, significant financial resources, traditions of rigorous adherence to building codes and rapid accessibility to affected areas.

Compare these with Nepal's 2015 earthquakes: devastation over a wide geographical area, rugged, mountainous terrain, horrendous access problems to rural and isolated mountain communities, serious challenges on the planning, building codes adherence and financial fronts, of finding and/or training sufficient masons ... and you expect recovery and reconstruction to be completed after just three years?

Name a reconstruction challenge and Nepal has it. Name an economic, budget or governance constraint and Nepal has it. Recovery is taking place as Nepal struggles to roll out an incredibly complex devolution process. But don't stop there, and say that nothing is happening.

Look around, go into rural areas beyond the motorable roads and you see women masons and builders working alongside the men.

Reconstruction is underway, with and without government support. Government grants are not enough to rebuild houses, and are not meant to be.

Yes, things could always go faster and better, but don't fall for the 'nothing is happening' cliché. It's too easy, and it's wrong. 🇳🇵



Nigel Fisher has been an adviser to the CEO of the National Reconstruction Authority for the last two years, and has been involved in post-disaster recovery operations around the world.



How to build back together

The government's way or the people's way?

Suyog Prajapati

Because the clustered towns of the Newārs in Kathmandu Valley suffered the brunt of the 2015 earthquake, there is now pressure on the national government to respect the traditions, needs and demands of the local people in reconstructing them.

Almost three years on, many homes have yet to be rebuilt even though monuments next door are being rebuilt with foreign assistance. Confusion about housing grants as well as disagreement on whether they should be rebuilt the government's way or as the local people want, have delayed rebuilding.

Because individual houses occupy such small areas of the dense inner-city and land is so expensive, the government would like the people to move into apartment blocks. But original inhabitants would be living in flats, or be displaced. House pooling was proposed as an ideal solution with shared ownership, but even that has been marred with legal and ethical issues.

Damba *Chuka* in Kathmandu is an example. Maharjans, Dongols, Myepus and Sāpus mainly live in this neighbourhood of the Kilāghal area. Most are farmers or have livestock, while others are involved in trade and service. Their 80 houses are spread along a narrow passage and around tiny, yet well-lit courtyards. The presence of wood, clay and brick houses, wells, shrines, stūpas and *chuka* (courtyards) are all defining features of classical Newar architecture, and make the neighbourhood a model for indigenous Nepali heritage.

After the earthquake damaged a part of it, the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) proposed a single monolithic structure. Land ownership certificates



POOL OR NOT: Dharma Narayan Myepu in his courtyard in Kathmandu (*left*) is against house-pooling, saying he will lose control of his property, while Manish Maharjan at Damba *Chuka* (*right*) says it would be the most rational option and will preserve the original architecture of the neighbourhood.

of individual householders would be exchanged for shares and spaces in the new apartments. Lower floors would be rented out to help finance the construction. "The access lane of the *chuka* would be widened to allow entry for larger vehicles, individual residences would be reconstructed together from the ground up, and rentals and homestay tourism would generate income," says resident Manish Maharjan.

However, not everyone agrees. Some simply want to retain their ownership of ancestral homes and



PHOTOS: SUYOG PRAJAPATI

do not want to be part of any house pooling because of fear that they would lose individual control. Native families occupy only 21 houses with the rest unoccupied or rented out. "People here want complete ownership of their houses and land, we see no advantage in house pooling," says another resident Dharma Narayan Myepu.

Similar house pooling proposals have been made for Bhaktapur, based on a study by Bijay K Shrestha of the Khwopa Engineering College and a Japanese

group. Among the three highly affected areas of the town, Tekhācho was proposed for revitalisation. The historic footprint would be retained and the individual houses rebuilt together. Structures with joint ownership would have common staircases, and lower levels would be rented out. However, even here, there were legal hurdles regarding ownership, household size and compensation, and so the pilot project is stalled for now.

In Patan, progress has been made in micro-pooling and cooperative reconstruction. In Dhalāmchā and Swotha, individual homes have been rebuilt by harmonising the outer façades. Households have retained individual ownership, but came together to present a common neo-classical Rana façade with uniform building heights.

While the government and big housing projects want to house individual owners in core inner city blocks, locals are reluctant. They say their concern is not just being herded into large residential apartments, but also the impact that would have on traditional architecture, heritage and festivals.

Neighbourhoods like Damba *Chuka*, Taulāchen and Tekhācho are steeped in tradition that date back centuries. Individually, or together, it is better if they are rebuilt using native technology with modern technical expertise to sustainably preserve the ethnic setting and outlook for future generations.

Says Bhaktapur-based engineer Bishwaram Prajapati: "People do not agree with house pooling owing to its vague provisions. Most people are also reluctant to build in classical style because of increase in wall size and smaller room spaces. However, this shouldn't be much of an issue as there are obvious advantages of living in old-styled houses built with proper reinforcements." 🇳🇵

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Cute as an Ass

So, it looks like the visa applications of two Greater Asiatic One-horned Rhinoceri for permanent residents in the People's Republic has been approved and the animals in questions will be flying off soon, once they get their exit permits from the Department of Foreign Employment after paying the requisite fees and bribes.

Nepal is gifting two rhinos to China. Is that such a good idea? Shouldn't we at least saw off their horns first? While we applaud this new episode of Sino-Nepal diplomacy involving the endangered Odd-toed Ungulates of the Order Perissodactyla, we wonder where it will end if we make it a habit to gift our wildlife to friendly and not-so-friendly members of the international community.

However, a case can be made that there is great untapped potential to ship out all of Nepal's feral street dogs to a canine-loving country like the United Kingdom or North Korea. Kathmandu's cats could go to Italy. And the crows from the friendly neighbourhood garbage pile at Chakupat could be gifted to Australia, which has a shortage of these feathered friends. And as long as we are at it, why not send us donkeys to New Zealand?

While reporting on all this international trade in animals, diplomatic correspondents have to be careful about using species language. These are sensitive times and we cannot continue to say things like 'Nepal is going to the dogs'. That is an insult to our own office mascot, as well as doghood in general. And alluding to our current rulers as 'human hyenas' is a slur against all carnivores. Pigs could also take umbrage when we describe the current corruption contagion by referring to some bureaucrats as 'greedy pigs'.

Similarly, it would be inaccurate to keep on referring to a neighbouring country to the south whose name begins with the letter 'I' as 'the elephant in the room'. Much more appropriate in this day and age to say 'the cow in the room'. However, in light of recent zoological diplomacy, it would be politically correct and acceptable to refer to our northern neighbour as 'the rhinoceros in the room'.

And we have to be careful not to hurt the feelings of all the slugs out there when we say that Nepal's earthquake recovery is moving 'at a snail's pace'. As far as snails are concerned, they are perfectly happy with the velocity they are locomoting in, and all Nepalis should be too.

You may want to call me one stubborn mule, and since there is still freedom of expression in this country, you can. But I'd prefer it if you said 'cute as an Ass'.



The Ass

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