

NAMASKAR Nepal

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Nepal - a new beginning with teething problems?!?

The first earthquake in Nepal happened exactly half a year ago, to the very day. The Dashain festivities (for worshipping Durga, the Hindu goddess who symbolises courage, strength and wisdom) have just come to an end. The next festival, Tihar (Diwali – the Festival of Lights; for worshipping Laxmi, the Hindu goddess of happiness, wealth and beauty) will soon be taking place.



Flower garlands of marigolds

Festivals and rituals play an important, integral role in Nepalese traditions. They give structure and a firm hold in everyday life, in exactly the same way as the family and the village communities do.

Organised processes and advanced planning that make it possible to respond quickly, and also provide a structure, are difficult to find in Nepal in other fields of life, too. From our western way of thinking it is hard to comprehend. In Europe, everything is planned and structured days, months and years in advance. It is difficult to react to sudden changes. Subsequently, the wave of refugees also overwhelmed Europe without any prior warning.

In Nepal, sudden changes and constantly changing regulations are normal. Flexibility, creativity and talent for improvisation are necessary. We would like to demonstrate this with a small example in the tourist sector.

Just over a week ago we received an email from the NMA (Nepal Mountaineering Association). The NMA has been responsible for issuing mountaineering permits for decades. Until now the permits could be requested using an online application procedure. We have now been informed in the email that the competence has been transferred to the Ministry of Tourism with immediate effect. There was no further information as to whether the original application procedure still applies, or whether new conditions have to be fulfilled. And this albeit, when we are in the middle of the main season.



Tibet Himal Range

But when flexibility, creativity and talent for improvisation are not even of any help any longer in certain situations, a feeling of powerlessness comes over us.

We, too, feel somewhat powerless on site in the present situation. As already mentioned in our last Newsletter, the new constitution has given rise to protests and unrest in the southern Terai region. The initial attempts made by India at mediation between the inhabitants there and the Nepalese Government resulted in a blockade on the border. For more than one month now, this blockade has made Nepal's dependence perfectly clear. Even in such a precarious situation, Nepal would not

want to suddenly snub the Indian Government and accept help from the neighbouring Chinese.

Long queues of cars, motorbikes, government vehicles and busses are still to be seen outside the petrol stations. The purchase of petrol and diesel is strictly regulated. The buses are packed full with people - also sitting on top - who are happy to have found a place so that they can return home to their village and celebrate Dashain. This is what the roads have looked like during the past few days. The selection of menus in the restaurants is limited. Gas for cooking has become scarce. Many of the families are using briquettes or firewood for cooking. This is unbelievable in fact, but true - now suddenly when the festivities are taking place and the meals play a major part.



National main dish 'dal bhat' – rice with lentils

Due to the kerosene imports by the Nepal Airlines Corporation (NAC) from Calcutta, it is possible for domestic flights to be carried out. The sale of kerosene to international airlines has been halted. The foreign airlines have been requested to carry sufficient fuel, or refuel during stopovers in other countries.

But this is not the first economic blockade – India had already closed its borders in 1989 and 1969.

It appears from outside as if the Nepalese Government is not interested in the situation its country and people are in at the moment. The main concern of the Prime Minister, KP Sharma Oli, who was elected two weeks ago, is the formation of his new Cabinet.

During talks with India, the ball was kicked back to Nepal. First of all, Nepal should see that the unrest in the Terai region is solved and that the aspirations of the Madhesis and Tharus are met. Not until then would the safety of the goods vehicles crossing the border be guaranteed and the possibility be given for opening the main border in Rauxal-Birgunj, via which 70% of the fuel imports flow. For a week now, a few tanker lorries have been able to bring the much longed-for fuel to the capital city of Kathmandu but only because the small border stations were opened.

The people are putting up with the situation, trying to organise themselves on their own, or they are simply forgetting everything for the time being, whilst the festivities last.



Street scene in Kathmandu

Even in a situation like this the people in Nepal are left to their own devices. Just like after the earthquake, the people are all helping each other. We, too, have received enormous support from our local partner organisations. The transport company that we work together with, is making reliable and punctual transport services possible for our guests.

However, due to the "fuel crisis" and the change in government, our building approval procedures and the necessary material transports for the reconstruction work have come to a standstill. Nevertheless, we are able to report some good news on the part of our "Sunaulo earthquake aid".

Following the completion of the building dossier of our Swiss project group that was supported by the "Ingenieure ohne Grenzen Schweiz " (engineers without borders Switzerland), it has already been possible to hold local training courses for the villagers in Brabal.

Lea and Regula explained to the villagers what has to be observed when constructing an earthquake-proof building. Using a model out of Lego, the significance of the seismic belts and the corner reinforcements ensuring an additional stability of the houses, could be clearly demonstrated.



Lego in the Himalayas

Our next aim is to continue the approval procedure after the festivities and construct a model building as soon as possible. During the process it is not always so easy to coordinate everybody's viewpoints. We try to mediate between the exact requirements of our project group, the requirements of the international voluntary helpers and the opinions of the villagers. Only through understanding, tolerance, acceptance, composure, willingness to learn and patience on both sides is it possible for us to overcome the intercultural barriers.

Love for the country and its people enable us to carry on despite the adversities and give us the strength to maintain our motivation and commitment. We thank you most sincerely for all the support that we have received through your donations, your assistance on site and your faith in us.

We are very pleased to inform you that the new layout of our website www.sunaulosansar.org is now online, at last. The website is available both in English and German. At this point, we should like to express our warm thanks to Timo who always gives us fast, reliable help with his technical IT support.

Finally we should like to point out that we regularly include the latest photos on our Facebook page, "Help for the earthquake victims in the Langtang Valley in Nepal". By clicking on the small Facebook icon at the bottom of our website, it is possible to access the page directly. Also those who do not have a Facebook account are able to access the page, and then view and read the contents. All the photos and reports are publicly accessible.

Namaste

Temba & Sabine



Thank you - Dhanyabad