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Nepal Death Toll Could Reach 10,000: Millions Starving, Entire Mountain Villages Flattened

By CounterCurrents.org

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CounterCurrents.org



Death toll in the Nepal earthquake could reach 10,000 as rescue teams have started reaching isolated mountain villages. Entire mountain villages have been razed to the ground and millions of people are starving as they are cut off from all food supply and communication. Wet weather and cold are making life intolerable. An estimated 8 million people have been affected. Moreover, in the earthquake, 61 people died in India, and China reported 25 people killed in Tibet.

Survivors are telling: "We have no shelter, no food and all the bodies are scattered around." Now, for days, survivors are struggling under open sky with fear of epidemic looking larger.

Media reports said:

The official death toll from the Nepal earthquake has soared past 4,000 people by noon of April 28, 2015. The Nepalese prime minister Sushil Koirala has warned the toll could reach 10,000.

People are still being pulled from the rubble more than 50 hours after the tragedy. Water, food and electricity are in short supply and there are fears of outbreaks of diseases.

People are growing increasingly frustrated by what they say has been a slow government response. Huge numbers of people are facing another night in the open or with minimal shelter, amid forecast heavy rain.

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on The Status of
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of India**

The situation is critical in the remote rural regions towards the epicenter of Saturday's quake. But outside the ca many of the worst-hit villages in the ridges around Katmandu remain a black hole, surrounded by landslides that make them inaccessible even to the country's armed forces. Landslides and other destruction delayed attempts to reach the district earlier, but Gorkha, close to the epicenter, is feared to have extensive damage.

The Nepali authorities have begun airdropping packages of tarpaulins, dry food and medicine into mountain villages but an attempt to land helicopters was abandoned.

The government is only gradually getting a grasp of the destruction in these isolated places. It is nearly impossible to identify which villages are most in need, and how many may be dead or injured.

The chief bureaucrat in Gorkha district, Uddhav Timilsina, said rescue crews were unable even to distribute relief because they are confronting as many as eight to 10 landslides between one village and its nearest neighbor. He said 250 deaths had been reported so far, but that it would take more time to get an accurate count. "Phone lines are down, electricity is out, roads are blocked, so what can we do?" he said.

1,300 houses in Saurpani, but one resident, Shankar Thapa, said, "all the houses collapsed." "The whole valley has been destroyed." He added that it seemed unlikely that more than a few of the 600 residents of Langtang would survive.

Rebecca McAteer, an American doctor who was one of the first to arrive in the district of Gorkha, told 90% of her patients there were "just flattened". She said most residents were older men and women and children, as the younger men had left to find work elsewhere. Many have also lost livestock and have little food.

A district official, Surya Mohan Adhikari, told that villages around the epicenter were very difficult to reach - cut off by landslides - and that bad weather was hampering helicopter access.

In one village, every home had been damaged or destroyed. Residents of Barkobot village in Sindhupalchowk district said they had had no aid despite being just an hour and a half on good roads from Kathmandu. But helicopters had begun ferrying wounded from Gorkha.

Heavy rain has added to the hardship of thousands of people forced to sleep rough for fourth night. Water, food and power are scarce, raising fears of waterborne diseases.

An estimated 8 million people have been affected by the quake in 39 of Nepal's districts, and more than 1.4 million need food assistance, including 750,000 who live near the quake's epicenter in poor quality housing.

People aren't able to wash their hands before eating, women have no feminine supplies. Even when people have toilets, they are getting clogged up or over used.

People, women and children, the very old the very young, who have lost everything are sleeping outside in the rain.

The heavy equipment for search and rescue, etc. is having trouble getting through the narrow roads in Kathmandu Valley.

As emergency teams reach the areas around the epicenter of the Nepal earthquake, many are warning of scenes of complete devastation.

There is possibility of "high and significant damage" in the regions closest to the earthquake's epicenter, Gorkha and Lamjung.

There are villages where 70% of the houses have been destroyed.

The epicenter of the earthquake was Gorkha, though very few images have emerged from the region. Parts of Gorkha district, like the village of Paslang, have been completely leveled.

Mr. Timalisina said 223 people had been confirmed dead in the district but he said "the number would go up because there are thousands who are injured".

On Monday, an Indian journalist flew over the damage in Gorkha in an Indian army helicopter. The footage shows many low-lying houses, seemingly cut off in the middle of mountains and reduced to rubble.

The journalist, Jugal Purohit, said: "What we are witnessing here are villages completely devastated, destroyed; in a sense, rubbed off the map of Nepal."

Matt Darvas, of the charity World Vision, is in the town of Pokhara, further west from the epicenter. He told: "I took one man. He had been [evacuated] in to the hospital where I was, in the very first helicopter. "In his village of 100 homes, almost every home was decimated. He estimated 90%. That's a village of over 2,000 people. "There could be many other villages in a similar case where the entire village is all but gone."

Teams from many major charities have so far been unable to reach the more outlying areas of the country, but he plans to do so as soon as possible. Many are working with regional partners who are based in western Nepal.

But access to areas such as Gorkha and Lamjung, that are hilly, isolated and heavily forested, was difficult even before the earthquake that caused landslides to block roads.

Mr. Darvas said some parts of Gorkha could take up to five days to reach.

Flattened villages

Sukamaya Tamang, whose parents and brothers are stranded in one of the worst-hit districts, said families there have been left to fend for themselves, with no government help reaching them so far.

Tamang's family is stranded in Sindulpalchowk, some 100 km from the epicenter of the quake, where homes and roads have been destroyed.

"There are a cluster of nine villages and they have been all flattened out," said Tamang, who managed to speak to his brother over the phone at their village.

Tamang, 25, said the village has been banding together to care for the injured and help to cremate the dead.

Rescue helicopters have begun to reach survivors in Gorkha. Around noon, two helicopters brought in eight women from Ranachour village, two of them clutching babies to their breast, and a third heavily pregnant.

"There are many more injured people in my village," said Sangita Shrestha, who was pregnant and visibly downcast as she got off the helicopter. She was quickly surrounded by Nepalese soldiers and policemen and ushered into a waiting van to be taken to a hospital.

The little town of Gorkha, the district's administrative and trading center, is being used as a staging post to get rescuers and supplies to those remote communities.

Some villages were reachable only by air after landslides blocked mountain roads.

Some women who came off the helicopters were grimacing and crying in pain and unable to walk or speak, in agony three days after being injured in the quake.

Sita Karki winced when soldiers lifted her. Her broken and swollen legs had been tied together with crude wisps of hay twisted into a makeshift splint.

"When the earthquake hit, a wall fell on me and knocked me down. My legs are broken," she said.

Most of the newer concrete buildings were intact after the quake but remote mountainside villages were reported devastated.

Reports from further north are very disturbing. Up to 75 percent of the buildings in Singla may have collapsed and the village, a two-day walk away, has been out of contact since Saturday night.

Local officials lost contact with military and police who set out for Singla. Helicopters have had to turn back because of clouds. A few SUVs with foreign tourists bringing basic aid supplies had begun to reach Gorkha by early evening.

Chaos has reigned at Kathmandu's small airport since the earthquake, with the onslaught of relief flights causing major backups on the tarmac.

US soldiers

The Pentagon says two teams of U.S. Army Green Beret soldiers happened to be in Nepal when the deadly earthquake struck Saturday and are staying to help with search and relief efforts. The 11-person crew of a C-130 cargo plane that brought them to Nepal also is remaining in case of a request to evacuate any American citizens.

Kathmandu shifted 10 feet

CBS News science contributor Michio Kaku, a physics professor at the City College of New York, told "CBS This Morning": "The city of Kathmandu shifted 10 feet -- an entire city was shifted by the force of this earthquake."

“May not be the big one”

An engineer who works on earthquake risks says the 7.8-magnitude temblor that struck on Saturday may not be Big One for Nepal.

GeoHazards International's Hari Kumar says: "We were expecting an 8-magnitude to happen along the Himalaya; this is not it."

Immense seismic pressure is still building up along the Nepal-India border, and he says, "The stress which was developing west of this earthquake has not been released."

The devastating earthquake was part of a pattern of major temblors that have become so predictable that many seismologists had been expecting this one -- and at least one team of researchers warned just weeks ago that a quake was due in the exact location where this one struck.

"We knew it was going to happen. We saw it in '34," USGS geologist Susan Hough told the Washington Post. "The earthquakes we expect to happen do happen."

One team of researchers not only expected this earthquake to happen, but even pinpointed the location.

Laurent Bollinger of the CEA research agency in France told the BBC that his team had been digging trenches along the fault. Using carbon dating on charcoal samples found in the trenches, they discovered one segment that had moved in nearly 700 years.

The last time it did was in 1344, and it came 89 years after a segment of the fault east of Kathmandu moved -- the same segment of the fault that moved 81 years ago in 1934.

As it's common for strain to transfer from one part of a fault to another, Bollinger's team warned at a Nepal Geological Society meeting in early April that the same pattern could occur again. And now that it has, Bollinger is warning that Saturday's quake may not have been enough to relieve all the pressure.

"Early calculations suggest that Saturday's magnitude-7.8 earthquake is probably not big enough to rupture all the way to the surface, so there is still likely to be more strain stored, and we should probably expect another big earthquake to the west and south of this one in the coming decades," Bollinger told.

Saturday's quake has had a far-reaching impact. Death tolls and casualty figures are likely to rise over the coming

days, and the risk of landslides on slopes made unstable by the quake mean that the danger is far from passed.

In a sadly prescient turn of events, Laurent Bollinger, from the CEA research agency in France, and his colleagues uncovered the historical pattern of earthquakes during fieldwork in Nepal last month, and anticipated a major earthquake in exactly the location where Saturday's big tremor has taken place.

Down in the jungle in central southern Nepal, Bollinger's team dug trenches across the country's main earthquake fault (which runs for more than 1,000km from west to east), at the place where the fault meets the surface, and fragments of charcoal buried within the fault to carbon-date when the fault had last moved.

Ancient texts mention a number of major earthquakes, but locating them on the ground is notoriously difficult.

Monsoon rains wash soils down the hillsides and dense jungle covers much of the land, quickly obscuring earthquake ruptures.

Bollinger's group was able to show that this segment of fault had not moved for a long time.

"We showed that this fault was not responsible for the great earthquakes of 1505 and 1833, and that the last time it moved was most likely 1344," says Bollinger, who presented his findings to the Nepal Geological Society two weeks ago.

Previously, the team had worked on the neighbouring segment of fault, which lies to the east of Kathmandu, and had shown that this segment experienced major quakes in 1255, and then more recently in 1934.

When Bollinger and his colleagues saw this historic pattern of events, they became greatly concerned.

"We could see that both Kathmandu and Pokhara would now be particularly exposed to earthquakes rupturing this main fault, where it likely last did in 1344, between the two cities," explains Paul Tapponnier, from the Earthquake Observatory of Singapore, who was working with Bollinger.

When a large earthquake occurs, it is common for the movement to transfer strain further along the earthquake fault and this seems to be what happened in 1255.

Over the following 89 years, strain accumulated in the neighbouring westerly segment of fault, finally rupturing in 1344.

Now, history has repeated itself, with the 1934 fault transferring strain westwards along the fault, which has finally been released today, 81 years later.

And, worryingly, the team warns there could be more to come.

"Early calculations suggest that Saturday's magnitude-7.8 earthquake is probably not big enough to rupture all the way to the surface, so there is still likely to be more strain stored, and we should probably expect another big earthquake to the west and south of this one in the coming decades," says Bollinger.

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