



Helping Hands Sikkim organised a candlelight memorial and prayers at MG Marg, Gangtok in remembrance of the lives lost in the 25th April Nepal earthquake

# A FRIEND IN NEED...

Sikkim rallies to help neighbouring Nepal in their hour of need

Vivek Ghatani

Already shaken by a 6.9 magnitude quake in 2011 that had ravaged the Himalayan State, killing more than 111 people, and leaving many homeless, it was again shaken on 25<sup>th</sup> April when the 7.9 magnitude temblor having its epicentre in Nepal struck. 'The temblor was similar to the one that occurred in 2011 or even more intense. It was terrifying, people were running out of their houses, panicky and fearful,' remembers Tashi Gyabo Bhuita, a resident of Gangtok.

Thanks to the quake god, added Bhutia, the State which is yet to revive after the aftermath of the 2011 earthquake, did not suffer any damage, but, sadly, Nepal was reduced to a heap of rubble. Thousands were left homeless and over 7000 people were feared dead. It was time once again for the people of Sikkim to unite, albeit for their Himalayan neighbour. The State came together in a show of solidarity that included people from all age-groups and backgrounds.

## Tied Strong

Sikkim is home to a considerable number of Nepalis, with its Chief Minister Pawan Kumar Chamling also being one. The State fought a series of territorial wars with both Bhutan and Nepal beginning in the mid-18th century, and Nepal subsequently came to occupy parts of Western Sikkim and the Tarai region to the south. It was during this period that the largest migration of Nepalese people into Sikkim began. In 1816, these territories were restored to





### Little Angel

Udenla Sherpa, a seven-year-old girl from a border town of Sikkim, broke her piggybank to donate for the Nepal earthquake victims. She is a student of Little Bells School in Rangpoo, on the Sikkim-Bengal border. 'I have no relative in Nepal. However, my teacher taught me that the whole world is like my family. So, I hope it helps someone somewhere,' says the generous soul.

Sikkim by the British in return for its support during the Anglo-Nepalese War (1814-16), but by 1817 Sikkim had become a de facto protectorate of Britain.

### Marathoner Runs for Nepal

Amar Subba, one of Sikkim's most popular faces, vouched to run a 42 km stretch from Rangpoo to Gangtok, braving the unseasonal rains following the quake aftershocks, in his bid to spread the message that Nepal needs help and that people should come forward to contribute in meaningful ways. Dubbed 'Run for Nepal', it was organised by Subba in collaboration with several local organisations and NGOs. 'The "Run for Nepal" is an initiative which intends to mobilise the people in the State into proactively helping the quake victims in Nepal,' said the 46-year-old athlete.

'Sikkim which has a considerable population of Nepalis has shared a common brotherhood with Nepal since a long time. In fact, the people of Sikkim, Darjeeling and Nepal have a lot in common; this was reflected by the generous response to Subba's run for Nepal', a local historian told ENe.

### NGOs Mobilise Support

The Sikkim based non-governmental organizations

(NGOs) formed a new body 'Sikkim Helping Hand' to fight natural disasters, and provide relief and rehabilitation in the affected areas. 45 NGOs participated in the meeting held in Gangtok that vowed to fight natural disasters in Sikkim. 'Rather than working individually, it would be more fruitful if we come together to work as one team. So it was important to form a body which will represent Sikkim as a whole', shared T Lachungpa, the Chairperson.

Relief materials had got stuck at the Indo-Nepal border near Kakarvitta, when the Sikkimese team taking relief to the neighbouring country were asked to pay tax on the materials being taken. The NGOs then coordinated with the team to contact the Red Cross society in a bid to avoid any further delays.

### Motorcycle Club Pitches In

Members of Dirty Angels Motorcycle Club (DAMC) held a fund-raising camp in association with OMAS, a musical group, and collected around Rs 9 lakh along with utilities like blankets, medicine and other essential commodities. The people in Gangtok heartily donated whatever they could for the cause.

'We are thankful to the people of Sikkim, State Urban

Development and Human Resource Department and OMAS who helped us generate the funds,' said Gelek Gyatso, secretary general of DAMC. 'We reached Lamzong or Gorkha and carried out the relief work successfully,' he informed. Lamzong or Gorkha in Nepal is where the devastating earthquake had its epicentre.

### Doctors' Initiative

A team of doctors who recently returned from Nepal shared their experience. 'It was an experience that tested us like nothing else, a population of more than 200 people were forced to spend the night in a PHC located in the village as most of the houses had completely turned to rubble or were damaged. Many of the injured were still untreated and required TT injections. We sent a team of one doctor along with two volunteers each to Barpak and Deorali while another team stayed back and treated the injured as per their medical requirements,' said one of the doctors.

This team was the first from the State to reach Nepal to extend their solitary and help the victims with relief. Dr Mechung, who was the team leader, said that there still remains more to be done. 'Everyone needs to rise above nationality, cast, creed and religion and come forward to lend a helping hand in such times of crisis,' was his request.

The team visited places like Ghampaysal, Saurapani, Barpak, Deroali, Ganzay, Dhaba, Daraudi and Arughat treating over 600 people. 20

The writer is a freelance journalist based in Gangtok.

Photos: Vivek Ghatani