

BY THE  
NUMBERS

5,057

Nepal quake  
death toll  
so far

# Overwhelmed with goodwill

Nepali restaurateur unprepared for donations when message about him collecting for Nepal was sent out prematurely

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Since he heard about the earthquake that devastated his homeland, Nepali restaurateur Tom Shrestha has been unable to focus at work.

So the 45-year-old Singapore permanent resident toyed with the idea of organising a donation drive for people here to contribute towards the relief efforts in Nepal.

But before he could locate a space and confirm the list of items needed, things started spinning out of control.

A female customer had sent out a text message asking for donation items to be sent to Mr Shrestha's restaurant before he gave her the green light to do so.

Yesterday, Tims Restaurant & Cafe at Block 95, Lorong 4 Toa Payoh, was inundated with donors bearing a range of items they were hoping to drop off.

These included canned food, cup noodles and cereal. Others brought clothes and blankets.

## WRONG INFORMATION

They had to be turned away by a visibly distressed Mr Shrestha, who apologised profusely for the "wrong information" that had "spread like wildfire".

"The restaurant phone has been ringing the whole day. We have not confirmed the exact items needed and we don't have a proper place to store the items," he said, adding that the message was probably sent out last night.

"The customer sent me the message she intended to send out. I told her to 'hold on first', but she went ahead. We need another one or two days to get the details sorted out."

Mr Shrestha and his friends, who include about six doctors, businessmen and some cooks, are in touch with the Nepalese Society here and plan to travel to Nepal with the collected items.

To remedy the messy situation, Mr Shrestha posted messages on the restaurant's Facebook page, asking the public to refrain from donating until the logistics have been sorted out.



**DISTRESSED:** Mr Tom Shrestha had to turn away donors who turned up at his restaurant with donations. TMP PHOTO: PHYLLICIA WANG

As at 10.30pm yesterday, Mr Shrestha told The New Paper that the Consulate of Nepal has offered him a space at Jurong Industrial Estate for storing donated items. Members of the public who wish to make donations can go to the restaurant's Facebook page for updates.

Mr Alan Goh, 47, had wanted to donate more than 200 tins of canned food.

The project manager said: "I've already bought them so I'll hand them over once they've found a space. We should all help however we can."

Some donors who had to be turned away by Mr Shrestha expressed unhappiness and asked if they could leave their items at the restaurant.

One of them, a woman who declined to be named, said she had spent more than \$100 on food items including cereal, cup noodles and nuts.

She said: "I spent about two hours doing this and came all the way from Bukit Timah. I could have spent the time with my daughter instead. If you want to help, you have to be fast."

— Additional reporting by David Sun

## Monetary donations most helpful

If you want to help, give money instead of items.

This is the message that relief effort veterans have for members of the public who want to help victims of the Nepal earthquake.

Singapore Red Cross secretary-general Benjamin William said the organisation does not accept in-kind donations like clothes due to freight-related issues.

"Besides the need for permits, there may be delays in clearing the items at the airport due to the influx of donations from all over the world," he said.

"If there is a delay, a fine may even be imposed. That is after deploying extensive resources to collect, sort and pack at the initial stage."

Since launching the appeal for the Nepal earthquake on Sunday, the Singapore Red Cross has received more than 30 written queries on in-kind donations.

## FLEXIBILITY

Mr William said monetary donations are encouraged as they give the flexibility of buying items more quickly at unaffected areas within the country or near-by countries.

Corporate Citizen Foundation technical adviser Hassan Ahmad, who is in Nepal, said that when he headed Mercy Relief for eight years, he came across people who insisted on donating in kind.

"They were well intended, but generally not appropriate. Clothes may not be culturally acceptable at the affected areas or food may not be within the dietary requirements," he explained.

Mr Johann Annuar, who is Médecins Sans Frontières Hong Kong's peer representative for Singapore, said his best advice for those who want to help in the relief efforts is to find someone they trust.

"Go with somebody you know personally, perhaps a friend who's doing something on the ground," he said.

"That way, he can tell you exactly what he needs. And if you do decide to donate money, at least it's with someone you trust."

"If you do not know a relief worker personally, then donate through established agencies such as Doctors Without Borders, Save the Children, Oxfam and World Vision."

— Additional reporting by Ling Yuanrong

## HOW TO DONATE

### Singapore Red Cross

From now till May 31, the public can donate via cash, cheque, ATM transfer and iBanking.  
[www.redcross.org.sg](http://www.redcross.org.sg)

### Mercy Relief Singapore

Donate via credit or debit card, cash, cheque, ATM transfer, iBanking or telephone.  
[mercyrelief.org](http://mercyrelief.org)

### Local mosques

Donate via cash or cheque, or online via the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore website. Proceeds will be handed over to Mercy Relief.  
[www.muis.gov.sg](http://www.muis.gov.sg)



**HELPLESS:** A woman sitting on the rubble of her house in Sindhupalchowk. PHOTO: REUTERS

## Nepal struggles with sending aid to remote villages

With her husband away in India, Ms Sunthalia toiled alone in the rubble of her house on a ridge near the epicentre of Nepal's earthquake to pull out the bodies of her 10-year-old daughter and eight-year-old son.

Another son, aged four, miraculously survived.

Ms Sunthalia said: "I could see my son's fingers fluttering through the pile of stones. That's how I could see him and save him."

There is little government help so far. The only thing families like hers have been given is a thin tarpaulin sheet to lie under.

Four days after the country's most powerful quake in 81 years, authorities are struggling to determine the extent of the disaster in the Gorkha region and neighbouring Lamjung, where the epicentre lay, Reuters reported.

The central government in Kathmandu still has little precise information on where the damage is most extensive and who needs help urgently.

Communities are so spread out in Gorkha that some mountaintop dwellings further north, in the Barpak and Laprak areas, can be reached only by walking three or four days.

The fear is that there are many more like Ms Sunthalia, who are alone in iso-



**BATTLE:** Rescuers in Nepal struggle to reach remote communities devastated by the earthquake on Saturday. PHOTO: AFP

lated settlements further away, burying their dead and living out in the open with little food, water or access to urgent medical help.

## DIFFICULT CONDITIONS

Yesterday, army soldiers were racing towards Barpak in two busloads and then by foot up steep slopes to reach people feared trapped in their homes. A heavy downpour made their progress even more difficult.

Meanwhile, hungry and desperate vil-

lagers rushed towards relief helicopters in remote areas of the country, begging to be airlifted to safety.

"The ground keeps shaking. Each time, it feels like we would be swallowed, that we would die. I want to get out of here," Ms Sita Gurung, 24, whose home had been ruined, told AFP.

The country's Prime Minister Sushil Koirala said getting help to remote areas was a "major challenge" but, aid finally began reaching areas that had to fend for themselves since Saturday's 7.8-mag-

nitude quake.

An AFP journalist on an Indian army helicopter saw scores of houses across several villages in the district turned into twisted mounds of wood and corrugated tin roofs.

Said Miss Gurung: "We haven't had any food here since the earthquake. Everything has changed, we don't have anything left here."

An army officer lifted her onto a stretcher and carried her away. Military planes from many countries such as the United States, China and Israel have joined the rescue effort.

Mr Koirala told an emergency all-party meeting that the government was sending desperately-needed tents, water and food supplies.

But he added that authorities were overwhelmed by appeals for help from remote Himalayan villages.

"Appeals for rescues are coming in from everywhere," a statement from Mr Koirala's office quoted him as saying.

"But we have been unable to initiate rescue efforts in many areas at the same time due to lack of equipment and rescue experts."

Hospitals have been overwhelmed, morgues are overflowing and medics are working flat out to cope with an endless stream of victims who are suffering trauma or multiple fractures.