

NATURAL DISASTERS

Quake devastation 'can help Nepal's Maoists stage a comeback'

The recent earthquake has devastated Nepal. But what could be the political and security implications of the disaster? Could it benefit the Himalayan country's Maoist insurgents? Analyst Siegfried O. Wolf talks to DW.

© Reuters

DW: The death toll in Nepal's earthquake has surpassed 7,000, and the damage to the impoverished country's infrastructure has been massive. But can the disaster also have an impact on the country's political landscape, particularly in terms of the resurgence of armed conflict?

Siegfried O. Wolf: First, we have to differentiate between the political and the military dimensions of the Maoist movement in Nepal. There has always been a substantial threat of a renewed Maoist insurgency in the Himalayan state. We should keep in mind that the epicenter of the recent earthquake was in the country's northwest, not too far from the capital Kathmandu - an area in which the Maoist movement has enjoyed a significant support base for the past two decades. In this context, it is worrisome that this part of Nepal still feels neglected by the central government.

Having said that, it is hard to tell if the Maoists still keep armed militias in the country, and whether they have the willingness and the capacity to stage a new civil war.

Nevertheless, it is most important to avoid anything which could widen the divisions between the government and an opposition led by Maoists. Since Nepal is now suffering from an unprecedented catastrophe in terms of deaths and insufficient disaster management on part of the government, the Maoists can capitalize on it and stage a major comeback, at least politically.

Will the earthquake transform Nepal's political landscape for the better or for worse?

There are examples that catastrophes help bring people together. Also in Nepal, a natural disaster of such intensity can motivate the country's ruling class to finally make amends for their mistakes in the past, which have plunged Nepal into one crisis after another.

Apart from international assistance to deal with the devastation, the country needs a "national consensus" to deal with the upcoming challenges beyond petty party politics. There should also be a "constructive working relationship" between the government and the Maoist-led opposition. Repeating historical failures would lead the South Asian nation into total anarchy in all spheres of the state and



© Siegfried Wolf

Siegfried O. Wolf: "The likelihood of another armed confrontation in Nepal cannot be ruled out"

society -economic, social and political.

The likelihood of another armed confrontation in Nepal cannot be ruled out. Therefore, all major political actors must understand the urgency of the situation and show the willingness to put aside partisan interests.

Many experts say that the earthquake was not unexpected. Why was the country not better prepared?

DW RECOMMENDS

Death toll in Nepal earthquake surpasses 7,000

Officials in Nepal have said more than 7,000 people have been killed in the country's earthquake. Survivors are facing a shortage of shelter while the main airport's runway is struggling to cope with aid deliveries. (03.05.2015)

Nepal excludes possibility of survivors in rubble, to concentrate on aid for victims

Opinion: Experience makes you wiser

Nepal is not the only country in the region which is ill-prepared to deal with earthquakes and other natural disasters. However, it seems that the Himalayan state and its society illustrate all kinds of possible fault lines hampering sustainable development: political instability, bureaucratic hurdles, rampant corruption, traditional nepotism, high population density, massive poverty, weak infrastructure, and a challenging mountainous terrain. As a result, Nepal, as one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world, was hampered by a ramshackle institutional infrastructure for the management of natural catastrophes.

How has the political instability affected Nepal's disaster

preparedness?

The major reason for the insufficient crisis management is the ongoing political and constitutional crises in Nepal. But it would be wrong to blame only political instability for the lack of disaster preparedness; one must also take into account the low level of economic development, limited financial resources, as well as the very difficult terrain for relief workers and organizations.

Despite political instability, resource shortages, and skepticism about a realistic opportunity to carry out efficient long-term disaster management planning, the Nepalese government has taken some concrete steps towards disaster preparedness. For example, in 2009 a "National Strategy for Disaster Risk Management" was developed, the Nepal Risk Reduction Consortium (NRRC) was formed, and the National Planning Commission was instructed to integrate disaster reduction risk management into its overall development strategy to prepare for future catastrophes. Also a National Coordination Center was set up to cope with natural calamities. However, it was probably too little and too late.

What are the prospects for stability, recovery and reconstruction in Nepal?

Nepal is slowly getting out of the state of shock. The lesser affected parts of the country are now gradually finding their way back to business as usual. However, the major threat for the stability, peace, and security in the country lies in the long-term process of reconstruction, especially when it comes to the distribution of international assistance. In this context, the current inadequate governmental disaster management and the subsequent rising enrageament among many of the earthquake victims will deepen already existing socio-political cleavages within Nepal's fractured society.



© Reuters/A. Abidi

Siegfried O. Wolf: 'Nepal is not the only country in the region which is ill-prepared to deal with earthquakes'

What role can Nepalese civil society play in the reconstruction and reconciliation work?

Nepal's biggest asset in the current crisis is the emergence of a strong civil society and growing social capital since the introduction of multi-party democracy to the country. The civil society, with the help of the international community, has the ability to put Nepal back on track towards recovery and political reconciliation. The 1934 earthquake showed us that Nepal's vibrant communities are able to rebuild their country. The country's civil society and the government should create more opportunities for political participation of the people. In this respect, it would be of utmost importance for all parties to come to an agreement on a new constitution and to hold local elections, which have been suspended in Nepal since the late 1990s.

Siegfried O. Wolf is a director of research at Brussels-based South Asia Democratic Forum (SADF), and a researcher at the University of Heidelberg's South Asia Institute.

The interview was conducted by Shamil Shams.

Date 04.05.2015

Author Interview: Shamil Shams

Related Subjects [Asia](#)

Keywords [Asia](#), [Nepal](#), [earthquake](#), [natural disaster](#), [Maoists](#)

Share [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [Google+](#) [More](#)

Feedback: Send us an e-mail. Please include your name and country in your reply.

Print [Print this page](#)

Permalink <http://dw.de/p/1FJhe>

RELATED CONTENT



European Union increases Nepal earthquake funds
04.05.2015

The European Union has spurred its financial assistance for Nepal's quake victims. Meanwhile, the Nepalese government said a shortage of helicopters is hindering its relief efforts in worst-hit remote areas.



Mounting anger over Nepali government's disaster management
05.05.2015

As relief teams struggle to reach remote villages in quake-hit Nepal, anger and frustration at the slow pace of aid delivery are growing in the Himalayan nation, with some using the discontent to score political points.



Opinion: Experience makes you wiser 28.04.2015

Despite the flow of international aid to Nepal, the country still needs a lot more. The recent earthquake has overwhelmed the Himalayan nation, but at this moment Nepal doesn't need our criticism, says Alexander Freund.