

NEPAL EARTHQUAKE SPECIAL REPORT

Mike King is helping a charity in Nepal with the aim of raising USD\$50,000. This will be enough to feed and provide shelter through the monsoon season for almost 600 families in Sindhupalchowk who have been left homeless. If you would like to know more about the charity and how an extraordinary 19-year old survived the earthquake and is now trying his best to keep the villagers of Sindhupalchowk alive, please click here <http://www.gofundme.com/u87q42aw>



Mike last weekend in Bhaktapur, 13 km from Kathmandu. The ancient town and its many temples were devastated by the 25 April quake

Michael King, Ti's Head of Operations in Asia, has spent the last week observing humanitarian logistics operations in Nepal. In Part 1 of his analysis he explains how this is being conducted at Tribhuvan Kathmandu International Airport (KTM) where he, uniquely, has had full airside access. He believes that operational equipment and political shortcomings are decreasing efficiency and driving up costs.

Next week he will examine the formidable road logistics challenges facing this landlocked Himalayan country.

Put simply, Nepal is in a race against time to supply the hundreds of thousands of people with adequate shelter and food before the monsoon season arrives next month. Many people will die unless the humanitarian logistics effort is a success.

Operations at KTM

On 25 April a massive 7.8 magnitude earthquake devastated Nepal and left hundreds of thousands of people without homes. The death toll continues to rise.

In the next few weeks the monsoon season will start, bringing with it further logistics difficulties. Given its land-locked location, much of the relief effort has focused on moving freight through Tribhuvan Kathmandu International Airport (KTM) - Nepal's sole international airport.



DHL staff were having a picnic overlooking Bhaktapur on 25 April. They watched in horror as large areas of the town were destroyed throwing up a huge dust cloud

The initial relief effort focused squarely on delivering as much emergency food, water and medicine as possible through KTM. The Indian, Chinese and US governments were quick to arrive and started operating in different sectors of the airport assisting with incoming freight and helping Nepali ground handlers who were initially swamped.

DHL's Disaster Response Team was also on the scene rapidly and, using any equipment it could find, started clearing a fourth section of the apron next to the US Air Force.

Most of the freight that arrives at the airport is trucked out to a nearby staging area operated by the UN's World Food Programme (WFP), which is overseeing the humanitarian logistics effort. From there it is trucked around the country.

But while KTM is now functioning far better than it was immediately after 25 April, it is still struggling with multiple bottlenecks that are preventing the smooth receipt and distribution of humanitarian relief.

Current air freight bottlenecks in Nepal

- There is a lack of airports in Nepal and KTM has just nine stands and one runway. Considering the amount of cargo NGOs are trying to fly in, there is a huge mismatch between supply and demand. There is talk of building a second international airport near Pokhara but this will take time and, with the monsoon season due in June, time is in short supply.

- There is some confusion over priorities at the airport. There is a steady flow of scheduled airline services coming in and out but many of them are not full with passengers. By contrast, at least 50 freighters are lined up worldwide waiting for landing slots. Nobody at the airport understands why passenger flights are being given priority when the need for aid remains so urgent. On Friday afternoon barely a single freighter landed and the apron was empty.
- Because so many freighters carrying aid even with assigned landing slots have to circle before landing – sometimes for up to four hours – they have to carry more fuel which means less cargo.
- Passengers are directed – rather, they are left to find their own way – through ongoing cargo operations, slowing handling down.

- The runway was damaged soon after the earthquake relief effort began. As a result landing and take-off weights of freighters have since been limited to 196 tonnes. This is forcing the greater deployment of smaller freighters such as Ilyushin 76s and C130s.



They can carry just a third of the weight of larger aircraft such as MD-11s and Antonov 124s. As a rough guide, an MD11's payload under normal operating conditions is about 93 tonnes but under current restrictions it is just over 40 tonnes. An Il76 usually carries about 25 tonnes.

- The new restrictions not only increase the pressure on landing slots, they are also driving up charter costs for smaller freighters. In the last week charter rates have doubled on a typical Middle East to Nepal flight, pushing up the costs of the overall humanitarian effort.
- Geopolitics is also a factor at the airport. There are clear tensions between the US, Chinese and Indian militaries operating on the ground and in the skies and the Nepalese civil aviation authority is under immense pressure over who operates where, and who gets landing priority.

- The airport is desperately short of basic handling gear. The 50 dollies that are in use are poorly maintained. Another 30 would improve matters immensely.
- Unsolicited aid is a huge logistics burden. This often comes poorly packed and damaged or is ill-conceived – tents designed for the desert and cuddly bears are not in great demand! Nepalese handlers first have to sort this bellyhold cargo and then it is often not collected on time by NGOs. This creates chaos on the apron and inside the terminal. NGOs say anyone donating should send cash.
- The equipment sent or brought by some organisations is not sufficient. Dollies and smaller forklifts are in short supply. The US arsenal looks mighty impressive and its soldiers are doing their best, but moving a standard pallet with a tractor tines designed to lift a container is no easy task and takes a long time.

- There is also a mismatch between what is needed and what is currently available on the outbound side. Helicopters and smaller freighters are in short supply. Military assets are not being made available to the WFP. The fleet of four mighty Ospreys sent by the US have so far lifted little cargo. In any case, they have limited uplift capacity and are not especially suited to the small valleys and high altitude areas that need to be reached. By contrast, the three Chinooks sent by the UK government are perfect for Nepal but have not so far been granted permits by Nepal to operate. A huge K-Loader also sent by the UK to handle cargo with economies of scale stands unused, its engineer and operator redundant, unable even to acquire an airport security pass.



The US Army is operating four Bell Boeing V-22 Ospreys from KTM.

- Permitting: In the last week Nepali authorities have made it increasingly difficult for charter companies to obtain a landing permit for humanitarian aid.
- Industry expertise: This is a logistics crisis as much as a humanitarian one but the world's leading companies are not to be seen. DHL's Disaster Response Team arrived as soon as it was possible. Staffed with volunteers and here on a pro-bono basis, in an ideal world they would like to fly in with their own equipment rather than have to make do with what they have found at the airport or leased locally. But make do they have. Their staff have been working 12 hour shifts in the baking sun out on the

tarmac handling aid arriving on chartered freighters. DHL are here but it is highly noticeable that their peers, many of them with admirable Corporate Social Responsibility policies, are largely absent, although some have sent cash or, like UPS, are prioritizing asset deployment to support the relief effort.

Solutions

- Sort out the slot management system. When DHL and the various militaries arrived the airport was awash with cargo. Now it is clear, but not enough chartered freighters can get into Nepal. An estimated 550 tonnes of cargo is sitting at Delhi Airport while half-empty passenger planes are given priority. This is mismanagement on a vast and dangerous scale.
- More of the right equipment, both inbound and outbound, would help – helicopters, small freighters, 4x4s, forklifts, dollies and trucks are all needed.
- More transparency over the slot allocation landing list would enable handlers to plan better to receive cargo.
- More expert assistance from the logistics industry would help. Apart from DHL's Disaster Response Team, the world's leading and most profitable integrators and forwarders are notable by their absence. Their skills and equipment are much in need.
- Less unsolicited aid parcels would free up handling capacity.
- The construction of a second runway anywhere in Nepal would be a huge help, especially as the monsoon season approaches which will mean the run-off areas at KTM will become unusable.
- Reduce permitting for chartered humanitarian flights, especially the need for an Aircraft Operating Certificate.



DHL's Disaster Response Team was on the scene quickly. More industry expertise and equipment is urgently needed

- Less geopolitics – with the humanitarian crisis likely to deteriorate unless the four week window before the monsoon season starts is made best use of, the behavior of the ‘Great Powers’ at the airport, and in Nepal in general, is frankly embarrassing and potentially life-threatening. Sending huge arsenals of men, money and equipment only makes sense if it is well-conceived and deployed. At the moment that is not the case.

About the Author

Mike King, Head of Operations & Senior Analyst: Asia, grew up as part of his family’s international forwarding and trucking business before going on to become an award-winning shipping, air freight and supply chain journalist and analyst. He has spent much of the last decade building up his extensive knowledge of logistics markets in Asia while contributing to many leading publications.

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