

Nepal's noodle billionaire steps in to help the earthquake-affected

Utpal Parashar, Hindustan Times, Kathmandu | Updated: Feb 07, 2016 18:55 IST



Del Bahadur Bajagain, 84, shares his experiences of the 1934 and 2015 earthquakes. (Utpal Parashar/HT Photo)

Earthquakes and Del Bahadur Bajagain have a thing. The 84-year-old experienced the last two big temblors that rocked Nepal and lived to tell the tale.

The octogenarian was three years old when his house was razed by the 1934 quake. It took his family a long time to pick up the pieces. His house was destroyed in last year's quake too, but this time there was help at hand.

Bajagain, who lives in Bhurungchuli, a small settlement 25km outside Kathmandu, is among the many beneficiaries of Nepal's noodle king Binod Chaudhary.

The 60-year-old, listed by Forbes as Nepal's only billionaire, has built 1,700 shelters for people whose homes were destroyed by last year's quakes.

Bajagain is one of many who were lucky to have a roof over their heads within weeks of the disaster, which claimed nearly 9,000 lives and destroyed over half a million houses in 14 districts.

“Unlike many others who are still living in tents, we were lucky to have a shelter that protected us from the monsoon and the winter,” said Bajagain.

Chaudhary heads Chaudhary Group, Nepal’s biggest business conglomerate with interests in construction, cement, education, hospitality, banking and energy. But it was the Wai Wai brand of noodles, popular across South Asia, that catapulted his group into the big league. Soon after last year’s quake, the Chaudhary Foundation announced it would build 1,000 transitional houses on its own and another 9,000 shelters with help from donors. It is also rebuilding 100 schools.

Each shelter made of bamboo, plaster and other locally available materials costs nearly \$750 (about NRs 75,000).

With support pouring in from Price Waterhouse Coopers, Alibaba Foundation of China and India’s Tata and Shapoorji Paloonji groups, the goal of 10,000 homes is fast becoming a reality.

“We moved into our new shelter seven months ago. It has really helped the family cope with the quake much better than others,” said Kamala Goley, a 32-year-old housewife.

Goley’s family lost its two-storey house in one of the quakes. She shares her new shelter with her husband and three children.

Like Bajagain and Goley, hundreds have moved into similar shelters in 10 of the 14 worst affected districts. Children in these districts have benefited from 30 schools built by the foundation.

“In order to make quake survivors economically self-reliant, our foundation has started vocational skills training programme in the affected districts,” Chaudhary said last month.



Kamala Goley outside her transitional shelter constructed with help from Chaudhary Foundation at Bhurungchuli near Kathmandu. (Utpal Parashar/HT Photo)

The efforts by his foundation and other such groups to provide succour to the victims comes at a time when the government has failed to do enough for those in need.

According to the UN, nearly 200,000 families are still living in tents and many at higher altitudes are suffering from cold-related ailments.

A reconstruction authority to rebuild damaged structures was set up in December, but it has still not started working to use the money pledged by international donors in June last year.

Chaudhary group builds 1,700 temporary homes, schools in Nepal

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Kathmandu, Feb 7 (PTI) Nepals first billionaire has constructed 1,700 transitional homes and 30 schools, out of the 10,000 promised with the help of different organisations including Indias Tata group for the survivors of the two major earthquakes that rocked the country last year.

Chaudhary Group Foundation last month handed over 133 transitional homes to the quake-hit people in Hattitar and Gaikhura villages of Ramechhap district. It has so far constructed 1,700 transitional homes and 30 schools.

The group will finance the construction of 1,000 transitional shelters and 9,000 others will be built with the fund collected from different organisations, including Indias Tata group, Nepals first billionaire Binod Chaudhary said.

"We have reached some of the most impoverished areas of the affected districts and built transitional shelters," Chaudhary, whose grandfather had moved to Nepal one-and-a-half century ago from India, said today.

"In Dolalghat Village Development Community of Kavre district, where the whole village was destroyed, we (have) built 200 shelters. I feel so happy to see the whole village getting a new life. We also reached two of Gorkhas remotest villages - Gairung and Taklung to build shelters," he said.

"The happiness we feel when we see the smiles on the faces of the people in these areas is beyond measure. We are making our best efforts to bring smiles to the faces of more and more people who were rendered homeless by the earthquake," he said.

The group, manufacturer of popular Wai Wai noodles and part of a global hotel chains, is currently working in 10 districts which are Ramechhap, Dolakha, Sindhupalchok, Kavre, Bhaktapur, Lalitpur, Kathmandu, Dhading, Nuwakot and Gorkha.

Dale Bahadur Bajgain, 85, of the Burun Chuli who had witnessed the 1934 devastating earthquake, is happy to live with his grandson in the newly constructed transitional shelter. "It gave us a new life and we are safe as well as comfortable here," he said.

Over 9,000 people were killed in the two major earthquakes that shook Nepal on April 25 and May 12 last year. PTI SBP CPS AKJ CPS

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