Nepal names new quake reconstruction head, citing delays

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A laborer sits on top of the debris of a monastery damaged during the 2015 earthquake, in Swayambhunath Stupa, a UNESCO world heritage site in Kathmandu, Nepal January 11, 2017. REUTERS/Navesh Chitrakar

By Gopal Sharma | KATHMANDU

Nepal fired the head of its earthquake reconstruction agency and named his predecessor to the job in a game of musical chairs that critics say is only making conditions worse for the survivors of the 2015 disaster.

Thousands of homeless people remain in temporary shelters after the 2015 quakes that left 9,000 people dead and destroyed more than 626,000 homes, monuments and other structures.

Information Minister Surender Kari said Sushil Gyewali had been fired as chief of the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) tasked to rebuild after Nepal’s worse disaster in history.

“We have changed the official because the reconstruction work was very slow and many victims are still left without any government assistance to rebuild,” Karki said on Thursday.

“The changes will expedite rebuilding and the government will provide all help and assistance necessary for this,” he said.

Gyewali’s predecessor Govind Raj Pokharel has been reappointed to the post, he said. He was fired in 2015 when a new government took charge.

Nepal is in the midst of a political crisis after it adopted a new constitution in September 2015 as an ethnic community of Indian origin opposed it saying their aspiration for greater say was not addressed.
The country, sandwiched between India and China, has had three new governments since the earthquake, causing delays in rebuilding.

Renaud Meyer, country director for the United Nations Development Programme in Nepal said he hoped the changes will not stall the process of reconstruction.

Officials said 61,000 houses had been reconstructed, 475,000 families had received the first installment of nearly $500 in rebuilding aid while another 150,000 families had not received any assistance so far due to unexplained reasons.

Gyewali, the deposed official, said he would seek legal action against his dismissal.

(Reporting by Gopal Sharma; Editing by Sanjeev Miglani and Michael Perry)