



Race against time to build new homes

by **SUNITA BHATTI**

T&A Reporter

Nearly one year on from the devastating earthquake which struck parts of Kashmir and Pakistan, a Bradford charity is still helping the victims rebuild their lives.

Many of the survivors remain living in makeshift shelters and tents and need help in securing a future for themselves and their families.

Yousaf Razaq, project manager for the Great Horton-based Human Relief Foundation (HRF), has returned from a fact-finding mission to the hardest hit area of Kashmir, Muzaffarabad.

He returned to the HRF tent village, on the banks of the River Neelum, which had been set up in the weeks following the earthquake last October.

"Because of the poor weather over the past few months the government of Kashmir had to close the camp down which was housing 2,000 or so refugees," said Mr Razaq.

"It felt very weird looking around the camp because the last time I was there it was a bustling camp."

Now the HRF is looking at how it can help people start rebuilding their lives by building homes for those most in need.

Mr Razaq, along with colleagues based in the region, spent time looking at different designs for shelters and now the charity is hoping to move forward with a Japanese design which is earthquake-proof.

"The cost to build one house was put at £700 but that includes the cost of labour and wood which can be provided by the families, which reduces the cost to around £480 per house," he said.

"We have the funds to build around 60



AID: Yousaf Razaq, of the Human Relief Foundation, is hoping to help re-house earthquake victims still living in tents and shelters

permanent houses which are made up of two bedrooms, a bathroom, a kitchen and a veranda.

"These houses will have a life span of 20 years and will be suitable for between five to eight people."

The charity is hoping to begin work on the houses in the next three to six months before the winter sets in but because many of the survivors are orphans, widows and families who have lost everything, Mr Razaq is wanting to start as soon as possible.

"They need these houses urgently. The survivors are psychologically lost, they want to move on with their lives but they can't do that if they are living in tents," he said.

"The people of Bradford have been extremely generous in donating but these people still need our help and need to know that we have not forgotten about them."

Although the HRF has the funds in place to build 60 houses, the charity is hoping that further donations will allow it to build another 40. Mr Razaq estimated the cost of building 100 homes at £50,000.

He said: "We are planning to help those survivors who are in the most urgent need of housing."

The earthquake, which measured 7.6 on the Richter scale, killed more than 70,000 people and left 2.5 million homeless.

e-mail: sunita.bhatti@bradford.newsquest.co.uk