

The Annual Tibetan School Shake-Out

April 2010, 105th Anniversary of the 1905 Kangra Earthquake



In Himachal Pradesh, J&K, Uttarakhand, Delhi, West Bengal & Meghalaya



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Dharamshala, India April 5 – The Kangra earthquake on 4th April 1905 wreaked havoc all over North India and killed about 20,000 people even though the populations were much less in those days. To commemorate the anniversary of this important event, earthquake safety drills are organised in Tibetan schools spread across various states of the country every year. Since the 4th of April fell on a Sunday, the drill-called the Tibetan School Shakeout drill’ was carried out on 5th April this year. At 11:00 a.m, a special bell announced the start of the earthquake (drill) and students immediately did the drop, cover, hold exercise till the second bell gave them the signal to start the evacuation as per plan under the guidance of the teachers. The event was organized as a step towards creating a safe learning environment for school children, and to utilise the opportunity provided by the 105th anniversary of the 1905 Kangra earthquake.

With the addition of students from Tibetan Children’s Village, Ladakh and Sambhota Tibetan School, Pokhriabong near Darjeeling who had not participated last year, the yearly Tibetan Shakeout is spreading the message of earthquake safety far and wide in communities living with severe earthquake risk. The total number of students and staff members participating in the drill rose to 16500 and the Tibetan School Shakeout 2010 is perhaps the largest school earthquake drill in the country so far. School authorities mention that school safety is finally getting its due focus and safety drills are now becoming part of their school calendars.



TCV Ladakh, J & K



CST Manali, HP



STS Pokhriabong, West Bengal



CST Sonada, HP

This drill was a collaborative effort of GeoHazards International, GeoHazards Society, and the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives (LTWA) in conjunction with Tibetan schools under Central Tibetan School (CST) Administration, Sambhota Tibetan School (STS), Administration and Tibetan Children's Village (TCV) schools. The local government agencies and Disaster Management authorities of the concerned districts played an important role in carrying out the activities.



STS Dekyiling, Dehradun

Students and staff of these schools had been sensitized on earthquake safety earlier and had been practicing the drill regularly. Posters, colouring books and other resource materials were distributed for further reference. “The purpose of the Tibetan Schools Shake-Out Drills is to ensure that Tibetan schools in earthquake prone regions are prepared for earthquakes and other hazards and to prevent natural hazards from becoming disasters. School safety should become a way of life” said Mr. Nyima Dorjee, GeoHazards International, the coordinator of the Tibetan Schools Shake-Out Drill. Nyima had been visiting all these schools in the region and holding sensitisation sessions for teachers and students in preparation for the Shakeout.



TCV Majnu Ka Tilla, Delhi

The Upper TCV of Dharamsala began the drill with a drumbeat that started at 11:00 a.m. and stopped exactly after 2 minutes. During these two minutes, all the students and teachers practised Drop, Cover and Hold On under their desk in their respective classrooms. After the drum stopped, all the students came out of their classrooms covering their heads followed their evacuation plan and assembled in the designated open space after which the teachers concerned took a roll call to check if all the students had been evacuated



CST Dholanji, HP



Peoten School, Dharamsala, HP

safely. The rescue teams evacuated those students who acted as injured persons. The entire drill had a significant impact on students, according to student Tenzin Zompa, “During earlier earthquake drills, I was anxious and worried. But by now we know exactly what to do and all the students took the drill seriously and acted as if a real earthquake had hit us. The roles of the teachers were important in giving us confidence.”

At TCV Chauntra, a drum beat was sounded simulating an earthquake shakeout. The students under the supervision of the respective teachers began the drill by covering their heads with hands and ducking under their desks. After sounding the second drum beat the students came out of their classrooms in quick successions in a single line with books and bags in their heads to protect themselves from any falling objects. All the students and teachers assembled on the ground to avoid being harmed by a possible after shock. The class monitor then took the attendance of their classes to ensure none of their classmates were left behind in the classrooms.

At the same time, similar drills were also conducted in Tibetan Schools across Himachal Pradesh, Uttaranchal, Jammu & Kashmir, Delhi, West Bengal and Meghalaya. When the first alarm bell sounded to indicate the start of the earthquake drill, staff and students responded immediately by dropping under their desks for cover. They dropped to the ground, took cover under their desk and held on to it until the warning stopped. After that, they safely evacuated from the school building and gathered at their designated safe areas for the roll-call. Amongst these were- STS Bhuntar, STS Chauntra, STS Manali, STS Paonta Shahib, CST Shimla, CST Sonada, CST Dalhousie, STS Kulhan (Uttarakhand), TCV Gopalpur, TCV Ladakh (Jammu & Kashmir), Lower TCV, Peoten School, STS Gangkyi, STS Shillong, STS Pokhriabong, STS Puruwala, TCV Day School, McLeod Ganj, TCV Majnu Ka Tila etc.



CST Shimla, HP



TCV Upper Dharamsala, HP



TCV Majnu Ka Tila, Delhi



STS Shillong, Meghalaya

In Sambhota Tibetan School, Shillong, there were two drills. The first drill was conducted in the school at 11-00 am followed by a drill in the hostel in the afternoon. They practiced all the steps of a successful drill in both the exercises. At 11-00 am a special bell rang (different from the normal school bell) to indicate the start of the ‘earthquake’ drill. The students performed Drop, Cover Hold in their respective classes. After that evacuation was ordered and the children moved out to the designated area of the playground away from the buildings. A roll call was done and it was found out that 18 students were ‘missing’. Then the Search and Rescue team comprising of trained teachers located and rescued the 18 injured students and hand them over to First Aid Post. The Principal of CST Shimla thinks, “Himalayan states are located in high seismic zone with looming earthquake risk and it is important to be reminded of the past losses so that we can be prepared for the future’

Despite having small children between 3 to 8 years also in the school, the Sambhota Tibetan Primary School, Gangkyi conducted a well organised drill. They said “We did not have any problems as we had made plans specifically for the Shakeout Drill. We had practiced the recommended steps and the teachers worked hard to ensure a smooth evacuation.” In the TCV School in Ladakh ‘on the top of the world’, the Headmaster ensured that the drill will go smoothly by taking them through each step again during the morning assembly. The children were also encouraged to take the message of school safety to their families. The STS Pokhriabong near Darjeeling in West Bengal also used such ‘reminder sessions’ during the morning assembly to ensure that all students were clear about the procedures to be followed. This had the desired effect



TCV Chauntra, HP



STS Gengkyi, HP



STS Paonta Shahib, HP



TCV Upper Dharamsala, HP

as teachers reported that the students followed the steps as discussed without any problem.

In all the schools that took part in the drill, the students and staff had short debriefing sessions after the drill was called off to discuss the value of the effort, identify mistakes and ways of improving the drill. After conducting the drill regularly following the first Tibetan School Shakeout drill, most of the Schools found it much easier to carry out smooth evacuations. Most of the schools are working to include safety drills for various local hazards as part of the calendar. The response to the 'Tibetan School Shakeout' has exceeded expectations and students, staff and parents in these schools feel the need to carry forward the initiatives. This initiative of the Tibetan Schools is sending a strong message of preparedness to all the Schools in hazard prone regions. GeoHazards International, California, USA and GeoHazards Society, India have been working together in the region in various aspects of disaster risk reduction with special focus on school and hospital safety.

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TCV, Mcleodganj, HP



STS, Pokhiabong, Darjeeling



STS, Bhuntar, HP



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