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Highrises mushroom as Darjeeling stages mock drill to tackle quakes



The mock drill scene at St. Teresa's School, Darjeeling --- Pranab Chhetri

EOI CORRESPONDENT

DARJEELING, OCT 10/--/ The hills of Darjeeling are prone to landslides and susceptible to earthquakes and that's why it is important for the people to be prepared to minimize the damage and casualties in the event of a natural calamity. With this objective the Darjeeling district administration on Wednesday conducted the first of the mock drills in various areas of the town, simulating events like earthquakes, landslides, fire and building collapse which are regular features of the hills. The drill first started at the St. Teresa's Higher Secondary School where an earthquake-like scenario was created. This was followed by a landslide situation simulated on the Hill Cart Road, the main road running through the town. The next scene enacted was that of a fire in the busy and congested market area of Bich Galli. The exercise ended with tackling a mock building collapse in the Dhir Dham area near the railway station. Observers from the army and para-military ob-

servers along with the officials and staff of relief, civil defense, BSNL and electricity departments oversaw the search and rescue operations in the presence of the Darjeeling district magistrate. "The mock drills are a statewide exercise which is conducted in areas prone to earthquakes and landslides. Today, we created a simulation of scenes of various natural calamities. Students, teachers and even locals participated in the programme," said Darjeeling District Magistrate Joyoshi Das Gupta. The quakes of 2011 and 2015 shook the entire hills, the scars of which are visible even to this day. The very mention of tremors in news channels or the occurrence of such incidents in neighboring states trigger flashbacks of old memories and send shivers down people's spines. The DM emphasized the need to be better prepared to tackle these eventualities. "We cannot stop occurrence of calamities, but we can be prepared to deal with it. Our focus should be to minimize damages through following

proper safety procedures," she said. Das Gupta pointed out that Darjeeling hills were located in seismic zone IV and was prone to quakes and landslides and compounding the risks were the high-rise buildings mushrooming every year. "The permissible height of a building is G-plus III (11.5 meters) but most of the structures in the hills are above the safety level. There is a high chance of buildings collapsing if a quake of magnitude 7 on the Richter scale hits the hills," the DM said, adding the local civic bodies should play a proactive role in regularizing the heights of buildings and be more careful while granting permission for construction of high-rises in the town. The District Magistrate said the feedback from the day's programmes was positive among the local residents and schools. "We have been requested to hold such mock drills regularly. Today we conducted the drills in small pockets but in future we will hold it in a bigger way with more participation," Das Gupta said.

For commoners, high prices may be the real demon this Dashain season



Shoppers busy in Dashain marketing --- Shekhar Khawas

SUJAL PRADHAN

GANGTOK, OCT 10/--/ Dashain, a major festival of the Nepali community in Sikkim and the entire eastern Himalayan belt, has arrived this year too. This year, businessmen are hopeful of doing a good business in this fortnight of festivities. Last year, business prospects in Dashain were ruined because of the Gorkhaland demand in neighbouring Darjeeling in West Bengal. Remember Dashain is the height of the tourist season, too, and last year the flow of tourists to these hills were hampered severely because of the separate statehood demand in Darjeeling.

Dashain is the longest and most auspicious festival of Nepali people. It is celebrated to mark the victory of Lord Rama over Ravana and the victory of goddess Durga

over the demon Mahisaur. For each and every Nepali, Dashain has remained that one time of the year when all sorrows, grief and hardships are forgotten, and togetherness and happiness which they cherish are celebrated in a grand way. During this time people buy new utensils, clothes and eat good food. For the common man it is time for shopping and for businessman the time to do good business.

Business people are optimistic this year of reaping a good profit and common people hope during Dashain families, friends and relatives to get together and show reverence to goddess Durga. But, the demon has arrived in the form of high prices of all kinds of commodities and savings are not adequate; so it would be difficult to manage everything during the festival. Of course it

is the most important festival for the Nepali community and even within their limits people would celebrate; everyone would have to manage things according to his financial status and standing. "Spending quality time with families, having fun, chatting, receiving tika and blessings from elders and worshipping goddess Durga are the integral parts of the celebrations, but the with changing time the significance of all these have also undergone a change," said Chandra Pradhan, head of a family. "These days Dashain has become more of a social obligation than the time to celebrate. In the materialistic world it has become an occasion to show off. I simply don't experience the same kind of excitement that we used to do when we were children," said Binod Tamang of Gangtok.

Meet with land owners on Ven. Pem Dorjee Meme statue construction

SANJAY AGARWAL

RANGPO, OCT 10/--/ The details of construction of a statue of Ven. Pem Dorjee Meme were discussed on Sunday in a meeting between members of the Ven Pem Dorjee Meme Statue and Study Centre Construction Committee and land owners of Mangalbaria, West Sikkim, at Chuchen.

The Sikkim Government has already announced that a statue of Ven. Pem Dorjee Meme, the creator of 'Damfu', the traditional musical instrument of Tamang people, with the study centre would be set up in Sikkim. Since the announcement made by Chief Minister Pawan Chamling, the process of meeting people in different places was on and finally with the consent of Tamang families of the State Gerethang in Mangalbaria, West Sikkim, under Rinchenpong constituency was identified as the site where the statue and the study centre would be set up. Among those present in the meeting were MLA of the area K. S. Lepcha, chairman of construction committee S. T. Tamang and president Sikkim Tamang Youth Society Suresh K. Lama. K. S. Lepcha thanked the Chief Minister for sanctioning the construction of the statue and for identifying the Rinchenpong constituency as the site. S. T. Tamang thanked land owners for co-operating with the committee and giving their consent for the construction, including the road needed for construction of the statue of Ven. Pem Dorjee Meme. The foundation stone of the statue would soon be carried by the committee after a final meeting which is scheduled to be held at Hyangla Dheem (Tamang house) situated at Syari, Gangtok.

IN BRIEF

Seven killed as New Farakka Express derailed near Rae Bareilly

LUCKNOW: At least seven people were killed and nine others seriously injured as nine coaches and the engine of the New Farakka Express (14003) derailed near Rae Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh on Wednesday. The accident took place in Harchandpur area of Rae Bareilly district at 6.10 a.m. The injured were taken to the Harchandpur PHC and district hospital.

19 sentenced to death in 2004 grenade attack in Bangladesh

DHAKA: A Bangladeshi court Wednesday sentenced 19 people, including former state minister for home Lutfozzaman Babar, to death and 19 others, including former premier Khaleda Zia's son Tarique Rahman, to life imprisonment in the 2004 grenade attack that killed 24 people and injured 500 others, including the then opposition leader Sheikh Hasina.

Dilip Kumar responding to treatment

MUMBAI: Screen legend Dilip Kumar, who has been admitted to hospital, is responding to the treatment and will be soon discharged. The 95-year-old actor is being treated for recurrent pneumonia at Lilavati Hospital. PTI

Golay promises an election sans violence in 2019 in Sikkim



P. S. Golay with lawyers in a meeting --- Shekhar Khawas

SUJAL PRADHAN

GANGTOK, OCT 10/--/ "We will contest this coming election in 2019 without any first information report being filed from our side," Sikkim Krantikari Morcha supremo P. S. Golay said in Gangtok on Wednesday while addressing lawyers who supported his party at a Deorali hotel.

"The memories of pre-2014 election violence are still fresh. We have not forgotten how politics over deaths were played and overnight poster held. So looking at all the aspects we have decided that we will fight an elec-

tion without violence and we will not file any FIR." Golay said: "This year also we are sensing the conspiracy and play of politics over the death like in the last election. We also like to appeal to our supporter not to opt violence." The Chief Minister used to term our party as 'gunda party' but do they have any proof where we acted as 'gunda'? I may have termed something in reply but I never because we are not against the C.M. but we just want to change the existing system in the state which is unfair and only favourable to a few." Requesting the lawyers to extend moral support to

SKM, Golay promised to form a welfare organization for advocates and arrange a minimum stipend for practising lawyers to help them establish in the profession. At least 26 practising lawyers during the day came forward in support of Golay's party.

Lawyer William Tamang said the lawyers were concerned about professional injustice from the ruling party. "In the past the Chief Minister used to promise that by 2012-13 he would make Sikkim a self-reliant state but still we are struggling to get jobs and self-reliance is only for a selected few."

Sikkim tackles quake of magnitude 8.7 in mock drill

EOI CORRESPONDENT

GANGTOK/MANGAN, OCT 10/--/ A mock exercise was staged at the State-level on Wednesday on how to tackle the scenario of an earthquake in Sikkim. The mock exercise was planned and executed through an Incident Response System.

A mock scenario was presumed of an earthquake of magnitude 8.7 on Richter scale striking at 11.15 a.m. with its epicentre at Shillong. Strong tremors felt across Sikkim and West Bengal triggered situations of landslides, toppling of buildings, stampede, fire and challenges of evacuating large number of people from a campus. The State emergency operation centre was set up at Manan Kendra. The staging area was set up at Paljor Stadium from where men and resources were mobilized to different locations. The five locations were: a landslide scenario at Sichey, building toppling near Vajra Cinema Hall, outbreak of fire at Khadi Bhawan Deorali, stampede at Reliance Trends Store in MG Marg and mass evacuation at Nar Bahadur Bhandari Degree College, Tadong. STNM Hospital and CRH Manipal were roped in for medical emergency services. At the



A mock drill scene at Mangan town --- Deepak Sharma

district level, the incidents were staged in and around Rangpo town while the control room and the relief camp were set up at mining ground Rangpo. In the North District, the mock drill was organized at Mangan by the Land Revenue and Disaster Management Department. The drill was conducted under the supervision of Additional District Magistrate (North) S Adhikari and Senior Superintendent of Police (North) K. D. Sangderpa with

staff of Indo Tibet Border Police, forest, fire and health departments, the police, the disaster management task force, students and local volunteers. The relief teams were successful in rescue, evacuation and providing first-aid to all injuries. While an official release in Gangtok said the mock drill all over the State "played out to perfection," a witty observer wondered if in case of a real emergency things would work out as smoothly.

Madhesi party threatens to withdraw support to Oli Govt in Nepal

KATHMANDU, OCT 10/--/ The Rastriya Janata Party-Nepal, a key Madhesi party which has been demanding amendments to Nepal's Constitution, has threatened to withdraw its support to Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli-led government. The RJP-N leaders, who presented a memorandum to Prime Minister Oli on Monday, warned that if the government failed to address their demands, the party would withdraw its support to his government after Diwali. RJP-N has asked the government to initiate the process of amendment to the Constitution to address the demands of Madhesi, Tharu, Muslim and Janajati communities. "This is our last warning and if the government turns its deaf ear, we will launch fresh agitation after the festivals by withdrawing support to the government," said Rajendra Mahato, member of the Presidium of the RJP-N. "The government is not listening to our demands and is also trying to avoid the amendments to the Constitution," said Mahato, the former commerce minister.

Land donors of Sikkim decide to meet CM with their grievances



The meeting of land donors --- EOI Photo

SANJAY AGARWAL

RANGPO, OCT 10/--/ The Sikkim School Land Donors Association has decided to meet Chief Minister Pawan Chamling to place before him the problems of land donors in the State. This was decided at a State-level meeting of the Association at Singtam Nagar

Panchayat hall on Monday under the chairmanship of Association president N. S. Gurung. The main demand of the Association is that one member of a family which has donated land for the construction of a school under the Human Resource Development Department should get a job. After long deliberations it was decided that the

best way out was to seek an appointment with the Chief Minister. General secretary of the Association Ranjit Rai said the Association had sought information under RTI on the question of jobs for land donors but no reply had been received. The issue of silence on queries under RTI would also be taken seriously, Rai said.