

Tibetans celebrate New Year after strong earthquake

New Year celebrations have been proceeding as usual in the eastern part of Tibet Autonomous Region, where a strong earthquake struck before dawn Saturday.

Sunday is the first day of the Kongpo New Year in the Nyingchi area according to the Tibetan calendar. In observing New Year customs, locals would clean their homes, dress up in festive clothes, set off fireworks and have fun.

At 6:34 a.m. Saturday, however, the 6.9-magnitude earthquake struck Nyingchi City. The quake was felt strongly in all of the eight counties and districts in Nyingchi. It caused three injuries. Houses of 1,453 families had damages, the city government said.

At the Lunang township, where the epicenter of the earthquake was monitored, dozens of villagers gathered to perform archery and make toast for the New Year.

For Nyima Wangyel, who lives in Puchu township, preparing a feast for his dogs is a must do for celebrating the New Year.

"The dogs ate tsamba (roasted barley flour) first, and we see this as a good omen for harvest for the next year," he said.

By Sunday afternoon, more than 4,000 rescue workers, including armed police and fire fighters, have been sent to different townships in Nyingchi for relief efforts after the strong quake. Close to 400 vehicles were also dispatched to aid the rescue.

More than 500 tents have been set up for those whose homes were damaged in the quake, the disaster relief headquarters said.

"When the earthquake happened, many of the people were scared and they cried. When they saw the government responded quickly to help them, they felt assured and their mood is back to the New Year again," said Zhu Zhenghong, deputy head of Lunang township.

"Within two hours, township officials, police officers and soldiers arrived here to check house conditions and brought relief materials," said Liao Taiwen, a restaurant owner in Baiyi district.

Trok Cering was milking cow in the yard when the earthquake happened. "It was the largest earthquake in my life. The house was shaking and I couldn't stand still. It's terrifying," he said.

"I shouted to my wife in the house to wake her up and get out to the yard, but I dared not go inside the house at all," he said.

There are several cracks on his two-story house. A tent has been set up in his yard for temporary accommodation.

Local government officials are giving guidance in the rescue work. Disrupted power supply and communications have been repaired and services have been resumed.