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40,000 evacuated in coastal region as part of tsunami mock drill

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HYDERABAD: A major Indian Ocean-wide tsunami mock drill involving India and 23 other Indian Ocean countries was conducted on Wednesday to test warning and detection systems, an official said.

A tsunami warning was simulated with an earthquake of magnitude 9.2 south of Sumatra, Indonesia in the eastern Indian Ocean at 8.30 a.m.

About 40,000 persons were evacuated during the drill from 350 villages in about 33 coastal districts of eight states/union territories.

Authorities in Andhra Pradesh selected a village each in nine coastal districts for evacuation as part of the exercise to check the preparedness.

The mock drill was being organised by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of the UNESCO, which coordinated the setting up of Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System (IOTWMS) in the aftermath of the December 26, 2004 tsunami.

The Indian Tsunami Early Warning Centre (ITEWC), based out of the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (ESSO-INCOIS) conducted the mock drill in India.

The end-to-end warning systems -- from tsunami detection and forecast, threat evaluation and alert formulation, dissemination to public and their awareness and responses -- were put to test during the mock drill, officials said.

The major objectives of IOWave16, as the drill is named, include testing the efficiency of communication links, disaster management offices and local communities at risk.

INCOIS Director Satheesh Shenai told reporters that ITEWC was providing several special services such as tsunami warnings for all the countries in the Indian Ocean, Ocean State forecasts and high wave alerts for coastal residents and seafarers and coral bleaching alerts for environmental monitoring.

ITEWC head Srinivas Kumar said that the Centre encompasses a real-time seismic monitoring network of 17 broadband seismic stations to detect tsunamigenic earthquakes, a network of real-time sea-level sensors with 4 Bottom Pressure Recorders (BPR) in the open ocean and 25 tide gauge stations at different coastal locations to monitor tsunamis and a 24X7 operational tsunami warning centre to provide timely advisories to the vulnerable community.

The centre is capable of detecting tsunamigenic earthquakes occurring in the whole of Indian Ocean region as well as in the global oceans within 10 minutes of their occurrence and disseminates the advisories to the authorities concerned within 20 minutes through various modes of communication like email, fax, SMS, GTS and website.

The mock drill will continue on Thursday. On the second day, agencies involved will simulate a magnitude 9.0 earthquake in the Makran Trench, south of Iran and Pakistan, in the northwestern Indian Ocean.

Over 2,00,000 persons were killed in December 26, 2004 tsunami, which was triggered by an undersea earthquake off Sumatra, Indonesia.