

After Asia Tsunami

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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The Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 was the largest and most destructive in recorded history. In an attempt to recover from the awful destruction, the government of Hambantota, Sri Lanka, decided to build a resettlement village for citizens displaced by the disaster. The new community was to be located in Siribopura, a wooded, undeveloped area in the southernmost province of the island. The government appealed to international non-government organizations to underwrite the construction of 3,000 houses for families who had lost their homes to the tidal waves. Tzu Chi responded to the call by building 649 residential units. They comprise the heart of the Tzu Chi Great Love Village (or more simply, "The Village"). They were officially opened in April 2006, and turned over to selected tsunami survivors for occupancy.

Without a pause, Tzu Chi followed with a second phase of construction. Community buildings, including a school and a community center with a medical clinic, were constructed to augment the houses. Though these facilities are located in the Great Love Village, they are open for use by all living in the larger resettlement community. Phase II also included a neighborhood center designed for the exclusive use of the Tzu Chi Village residents.

Tzu Chi National School is designed to serve 920 students, although the initial enrollment was less than full capacity. The buildings on campus contain 23 general classrooms, a library, and nine special-purpose rooms dedicated to computers, music, arts, and science. Additionally, there is a 7,120 square-foot gymnasium; it is big enough to serve as a basketball court and doubles as the assembly hall. The new lighting system in the gym allows it to be used at any time of the day or night.



Generally, inadequate water and power supplies in tropical Hambantota make learning in local schools difficult. The new school, however, is free of these problems. Blessed with its own water tower, the school has restrooms complete with running water and sinks. Ceiling fans, overhead lights and bright floor tiles make classrooms pleasing and comfortable. Such things are not taken for granted in this part of the world. The students know just how lucky they are to have such "luxuries." They fully appreciate that learning comes much easier at this desirable school.

The school's name is affixed on the front wall of the gym in three languages: Sinhala, Tamil, and English. Sinhala is the official national language, spoken by 74 percent of the population. Tamil is another national language, spoken by 18 percent. English is commonly used in government and is spoken competently by about 10 percent of Sri Lankans. The same name and logo in Chinese are located on the front gate of the school as well.

The area just in front of the gym's main entrance offers a wonderful view of the adjoining 400-meter track field below. The woodlands beyond the track stretch into the distance. Sitting on the steps leading to the gym entrance, students can enjoy the activities held on the track

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field, or simply take pleasure in the gentle breezes brushing against their faces.

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