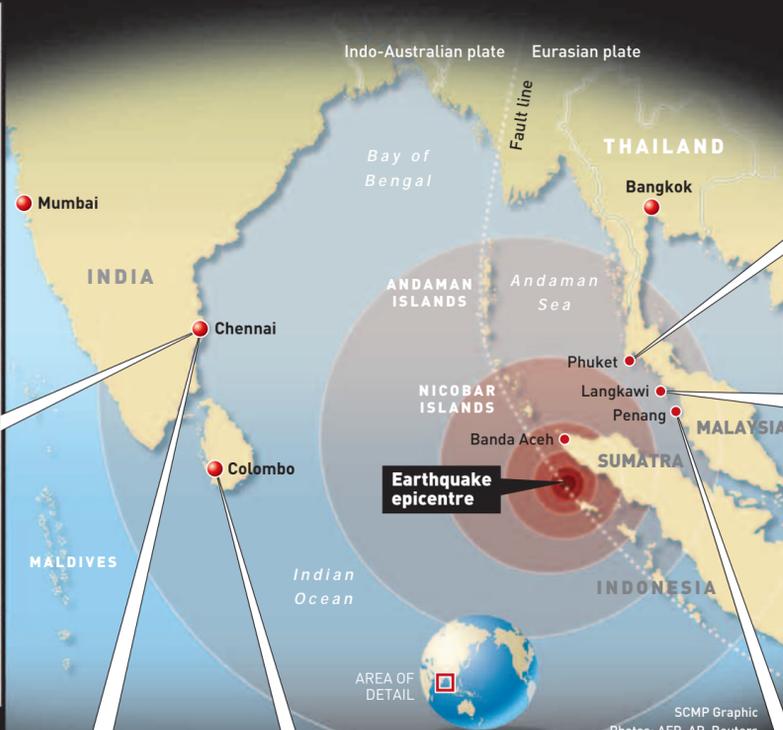


# Wave of destruction

World's biggest earthquake for 40 years devastates Asia | Wall of water up to 10 metres high inundates popular tourist resorts | Toll passes 7,900, with Sri Lanka, India and Indonesia the worst hit



Chennai: Rescuers carry a girl away from the shoreline at Marina Beach.



Phuket: Beaches were ravaged and waves battered into resort areas.



Langkawi: Boats lie tangled up with cars and buildings in a fishing village.



Chennai: A woman wails after the tsunami battered her home on the coast.



Sri Lanka: People search through the remains of beach houses in Colombo.



Penang: Officials watch over bodies along a coastal road.

## DAY OF DISASTER

8.59am: Earthquake rocks the northern tip of the Indonesian island of Sumatra  
 9.13am: Mild tremors felt in parts of India's eastern coast. Panic-stricken Chennai residents rush out of their houses  
 9.30am: Phuket and other islands and towns in southern Thailand are hit by a series of six to eight 2.5-metre waves, sweeping people out to sea, sinking boats and forcing the evacuation of hotels. Tourist town of Patong extensively flooded  
 11.30am (approx.): Tsunami stretching all the way from Jaffna in the north of Sri Lanka to popular beaches in the south crashes into the coast  
 1pm (approx.): The southeastern coastline of India is swamped by huge columns of water surging towards land, including the popular 7km long beach in Chennai

**DEATH TOLLS**  
 Sri Lanka: preliminary toll put at 3,300, but officials expect it to rise further  
 India: about 2,000 killed  
 Indonesia: 2,437 killed in northern Sumatra  
 Thailand: at least 257 killed; 5,000 injured  
 Malaysia: 53 confirmed dead, more missing  
 Maldives: 10 feared dead  
 Bangladesh: Two confirmed dead, but many fishermen unaccounted for  
 Sources: AFP, Reuters, AP  
 All times HK time

Reuters in Colombo

The death toll continued to climb overnight from one of the most powerful earthquakes in history which unleashed a tsunami that ravaged south and Southeast Asia.  
 More than 7,900 people died around the region when a wall of water up to 10 metres high crashed into Sri Lanka and India and swamped resort islands in Thailand, Malaysia and the Maldives.  
 The tsunami - triggered by an 8.9 magnitude underwater earthquake off the Indonesian island of Sumatra - swamped coastal areas, travelling as far as 2km inland in some low-lying regions.  
 Emergency services were stretched as resorts across the region were packed with tourists seeking Christmas sunshine. In Sri Lanka, where the death toll was expected to exceed 3,300, corpses floated in floodwaters, while thousands fled their homes, cars floated out to sea and landmines were dislodged from former war-torn parts of the country. Idyllic beaches were turned into fields of debris.  
 The worst-hit area appeared to be the tourist region along the southern and eastern coasts where beach hotels were inundated or swept away.  
 "The army and the navy have sent rescue teams; we have deployed over four choppers and half the navy's eastern fleet to look for survivors," military spokesman Brigadier Daya Ratnayake said.  
 In Indonesia, more than 2,400 people were killed as entire villages were deluged and people swept away. Worst hit was the province of Aceh, on northern Sumatra.  
 Two-thirds of the Maldives capital, Male, was flooded and officials voiced fears over the fate of dozens of low-lying, coral atolls crowded with

tourists. India braced for a devastating toll along its southeastern coast. In the state of Tamil Nadu alone, at least 1,625 have been killed. Rescuers were searching for hundreds of missing fishermen. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh put the armed forces on alert.  
 "The whole area has been turned into a cemetery," said Chellappa, a 55-year-old fisherman in Chennai.  
 The earthquake struck at 7.59 am local time in the ocean off Sumatra then swung north with multiple tremors into the Andaman Islands.  
 In Thailand, at least 257 people were killed and 5,000 injured, including some Hongkongers.  
 In popular holiday islands off southern Thailand, emergency workers rescued about 70 Thai and foreign divers from the famed Emerald Cave and several dozen were found and evacuated from around other islands, officials said. The bodies of six Chinese were recovered from one cave in the region.  
 "Nothing like this has ever happened in our country before," said Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra of Thailand. Tourist Boree Carlsson witnessed the devastation from his hotel 500 metres from Patong beach in Thai resort of Phuket. "I just

couldn't believe what was happening before my eyes," the 45-year-old Swede said. "As I was standing there, a car actually floated into the lobby and overturned because the current was so strong."  
 The Thai government ordered the evacuation of stricken coastal areas, which included popular resorts in Phuket and Krabi.  
 The Hong Kong government was last night to locate leading political figures who were holidaying in resorts struck by the tsunami.  
 Pope John Paul said Christmas festivities had been saddened by the tragedy.  
 The earthquake was the world's biggest in 40 years and the fifth-largest since 1900, said Julie Martinez, geophysicist at the US Geological Survey in Golden, Colorado.  
 "It was multiple earthquakes along the same faultline," she said.  
 Geophysicist Bruce Presgrave said: "These big earthquakes, when they occur in shallow water... basically slosh the ocean floor... and it's as if you're rocking water in the bathtub and that wave can travel basically throughout the ocean."  
 In Malaysia, authorities closed some beaches to the public after scores of people were swept away near the northern city of Penang. The victims were believed to be mainly tourists.  
 In another indication of the enormity of the earthquake's force, east African nations were affected by the tsunami. Countries stretching from the Horn of Africa down to Tanzania reported lowland flooding and tidal irregularities. Residents of the Seychelles also said their coastline had been devastated and roads damaged by flooding.  
 The world's worst tsunami in recent history hit Papua New Guinea on July 17, 1998, killing 2,500.

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- News A2&3 Counting the cost; Effort to locate politicians; 'Water smashed everything'
- News A4 Quake's 1,000km fault line; Beaches awash with grief; Offers of assistance pour in
- Opinion - A10 Editorial; Ming's view

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## TODAY

The Post today is in two sections: Section A, News & Life and Section B, Business & Sport. We return to full size tomorrow, but there will not be a Property section or Technology section this week.

NEWS & LIFE	SECTION A	BUSINESS & SPORT	SECTION B
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News Features	A18	Racing	B10-11

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