

The Indian EXPRESS

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B A Raju

DEATHWAVE

DEATH TOLL
INDIA 3,200

Sri Lanka 3,500 Indonesia 2583
Thailand 310 Malaysia 28
Maldives 10 Myanmar 10

9,500
+ AND COUNTING

TAMIL NADU 1,725
ANDAMANS 1,000
KERALA 121
ANDHRA 69
PONDICHERY 280

* figures based on agency reports



CARNAGE ON MARINA: A girl being carried away; (top) waves spared nothing

Tsunami from Sumatra swallows coast, lives in India

JAYARAJ SIVAN & RAJEEV P I
CHENNAI/KOCHI, DECEMBER 26

ON a dark, grim Sunday, as the Earth moved — literally — just off Indonesia, disaster and tragedy swooped down on India's eastern coast, riding the crest of 30-foot high tidal waves. Nature's double whammy — an earthquake at sea near Sumatra, leading to tides that cut into the peninsula of India —

killed at least 9,500, as per agency estimates, across southeast Asia.

By the evening, as officials in Chennai, Hyderabad and Thiruvananthapuram still counted the numbers, over 3,200 were feared dead in India: 1,725 of them in Tamil Nadu, another 1,000 in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

In India's neighbourhood, news agencies in Sri Lanka reported a toll of 3,500 deaths, in Indonesia just over 2,500. From Thailand's (over 300 feared killed) Phuket beach resort to low-lying Maldives, from Malaysia's Penang to Kerala's Kollam, a series of seafront locales, busy on the Christmas weekend, fell as if

playing out some eerie domino theory.

In India, Tamil Nadu bore the brunt of the tsunamis — tidal waves triggered by an earthquake under the sea, in this case off the coast of Sumatra, at 6.29 am IST or 59 minutes past midnight GMT. Kerala lost 121 people, Andhra Pradesh another 69. The gigantic ripple was felt as far up north as Nadia, West Bengal, where one person lost his life.

The darkest news, perhaps, came from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. New trickled in initially, as communication with the Indian mainland was cut off. By the evening, there were reports of over 1,000 casualties. It was unreal day. India

was left bewildered as much by the ferocity of the sea as a succession of cataclysmic freak occurrences. Chennai was flooded. At Port Blair airport, a huge crack rendered the tarmac unusable — though by the afternoon, an Indian Air Force An-32 pilot made a heroic landing on the treacherous surface.

This was no ordinary rescue op. The entire IAF base in Car Nicobar, Air Chief Marshal S Krishnaswamy announced late in the evening, was washed away, with 23 IAF men and their families killed. "Reports reaching us till this evening say that 63 more people are missing from the base," said the Air Chief, adding, "all buildings have

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Andamans cut off, damaged runway delays relief flights

AMITAV RANJAN
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 26

WITH the epicentre of the second quake barely 60 km west of Indira Point, the worst hit may be Andaman and Nicobar Islands. But relief for the islands may be delayed as communication and air services are severely damaged.

The impact got compounded after the waters swelled abnormally following the first tremors of 8.9 on the Richter Scale at 6:28 am, with the epicentre near Sumatra. The second quake, 7.3 on the Richter at 9:53 am, had the epicentre closer home and did most damage, said sources.

According to a news agency, at least 1,000 persons are feared dead and over 200 injured in the waves that rocked the

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Today's edition carries a 6-page special report: "Infrastructure Vision 2010"
Focus: Cement/Oil & Gas Industry

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'Wave came when they were cheering the batsman'

KRISHNAKUMAR
CHENNAI, DECEMBER 26

IT was one of those perfect Sunday mornings at the Marina: couples strolling down the beach, parents calling out to children, vendors pitching tents and those six boys playing cricket.

Then, at 8.30 am, the first wave struck. The first to go were the boys.

"I saw the wave approach and shouted to the boys to run. But they were cheering a batsman so loudly they did not hear me. The wave dragged them away," says Sankaran, a fisherman, breaking down.

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TSUNAMI: So rare that India did not bother to monitor it

RESHMA PATIL & ROYDEN D'SOUZA
MUMBAI/DONA PAULA, DECEMBER 26

TO understand why an earthquake below the seabed off Indonesia smashed the coastline of Sri Lanka and India, imagine a

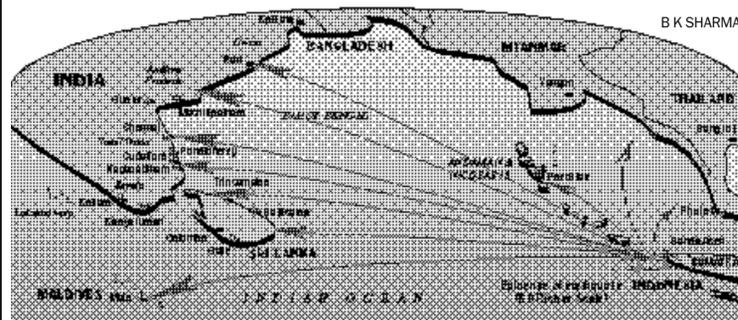
series of long waves travelling over the ocean at the speed of a jet aircraft.

Should this disaster—more frequent in the Pacific—repeat in Indian waters, we have no warning system in place. Until this fateful Sunday, a tidal wave

savaging Chennai was as believable as, well, the drowning of Fifth Avenue, New York, in *The Day After Tomorrow*.

"We have studied sea-levels for the last three decades. There was not a single episode or

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B K SHARMA

MICHAEL DOBBS
WELLIGAMA (SRI LANKA), DECEMBER 26

DISASTER struck with no warning out of a faultlessly clear blue sky. I was taking my morning swim around the island that my businessman-brother Geoffrey bought on a whim a decade ago and turned into a tropical paradise just 200 yards from one of the world's most beautiful beaches on the Sri Lankan mainland.

I was a quarter way around the island when I heard my brother shouting at me. "Come back! Come back! There's something strange happening with the sea." He was swimming behind me, but closer to the shore.

I couldn't understand what the fuss was about. All seemed peaceful. There was barely a ripple in the sea.

Then I noticed that the water around me was rising, climbing up the rock walls of the island with astonishing speed. The vast circle of golden sand around Welligama Bay was disappearing rapidly, and the water had reached the level of the coastal road fringed with palm trees.

As I swam to shore, my mind was momentarily befuddled by two conflicting impressions: the idyllic blue sky and the rapidly rising waters. In less than a minute, the water level had risen at least 15 feet — but the sea itself remained calm, barely a wave in sight.

Within minutes, the beach and the area behind it had become an inland sea, rushing over the road and pouring into the flimsy houses on the other side. The speed with which it all happened seemed like a scene from the Bible, a natural phenomenon unlike anything I had experienced before.

As the waters rose at an incredible rate, I half expected to catch sight of Noah's Ark. Instead of the Ark, I grabbed hold of a wooden catamaran that the local people used as a fishing boat. My brother jumped on the boat, next to me. We bobbed up and down on the catamaran, as the water rushed past us into the village beyond the road.

After a few minutes, the water stopped rising, and I felt it was safe to

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'I was being swept out to sea, I felt afraid, powerless'

FIRST PERSON