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The Nation



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SUMATRA EARTHQUAKE AFTERSHOCK

CATASTROPHE

■ Asia casualties approach 10,000 as tidal waves wreak havoc ■ Hundreds dead in Thailand ■ Phuket, Phang Nga, Krabi devastated

■ The Nation, Agencies

MOTHER Nature's greatest act of fury in half a century left Thailand mourning massive casualties and the destruction of its southern islands and coastal areas after giant waves triggered by an earthquake in Indonesia swept away lives, property and an economy that took decades to build.

The quake set off tidal waves in a continent-wide ripple effect that swallowed up a large section of Asia's coastal areas, including Thailand's holiday resort island of Phuket and five other provinces, where at least 300 people are feared dead and thousands injured.

The death toll is expected to rise. Eyewitnesses said tidal waves up to 10 metres high crashed down on seaside resorts, bungalows, beachgoers and tossed vehicles and property around like small toys.

At least 44 bodies of foreign tourists were recovered in Phuket alone and authorities feared more would be discovered as rescue workers continue their search for survivors through the night.

In Krabi, most of the nearly 50 fatalities brought to the provincial hospital were fetched from the water, apparently drowning deaths, while others were unable to withstand the force of the waves and died from the impact.

The official death count for Thailand was just over 290 at the time of going press last night.

Authorities in Phang Nga province reported the highest number of deaths - nearly 80 as of late last night. But that figure seems certain to grow. At the Yarn Yao Buddhist temple in Phang Nga, 102 corpses were laid out at the temple, according to Democrat MP Jurin Laksanavisit.

Rescue workers said they saw scores of tourists from a capsized boat floating helplessly in the sea just off Koh Prathong in Phang Nga but were unable to fit any more people on their boat.

Over 100 people were trapped for a time in the basement floor of the Ocean department store on Patong Beach. While most eventually made it to safety, two died during the ordeal, police said.

In Bangkok, the government declared a state of emergency in Phuket and declared the area off limits to visitors.

Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra left by helicopter last night to inspect the damage and held an emergency meeting with top officials in Phuket. Ambassadors from 21 countries were also scheduled to leave for the area last night to help with the evacuation of their nationals.



A STREET near Phuket's Patong Beach is littered with damaged vehicles and debris after the area was hit by a tidal wave yesterday. The most powerful earthquake in 40 years triggered massive tidal waves that slammed into coastlines across Asia, killing an estimated 10,000 people.

KING'S GRANDSON KHUN BHUMI 'MISSING'



The shocked Kingdom awaited with great anxiety last night for the latest news on Princess Ubolratana's son, Bhumi Jensen, 21, who went missing after giant waves hit the resort island yesterday morning.

A statement issued at the order of provincial governor Udomsak Asvarangkul said Khun Bhumi was last sighted in Khao Lak wearing a black jet-ski shirt.

He had been holidaying with Princess Ubolratana in Phuket since Friday. The statement did not give the circumstances under which Khun Bhumi went missing but suggested he could have been riding on a jet-ski.

"Anyone who spots a young man wearing a black jet-ski shirt please ask him whether he is Khun Bhumi, the son of Princess Ubolratana," the statement said. Anyone finding a person matching his description was instructed to contact any government office, or the mobile phone number 01-693-1799.

Earlier, unconfirmed reports that Khun Bhumi was among those present in wave-hit areas in Phuket prompted a flood of phone calls from the public and the diplomatic community to newspaper offices.

Khun Bhumi was born in 1983. He has been studying at Kasetsart Demonstration School. He loves outdoor sports and going to Pattaya.

THE NATION



Tidal wrath

Sri Lanka Dead: 2,500

Thousands of Sri Lankans have abandoned their flooded homes and fled to higher ground after the worst tsunami swamped the south and east shores, leaving scenes of destruction and horror.

India Dead: 2,000

Vast swathes of land were submerged in one of India's worst natural disasters in living memory. Wailing relatives gathered on beaches in southern India to claim bodies of victims.

Indonesia Dead: 1,900

The island of Sumatra has borne the brunt of the tidal assault, as raging waters washed residents out to sea and tore children from their parents' arms. Medics and police around Aceh said they expect the toll to keep rising with the full extent of the devastation still to be known.

Malaysia Dead: 42

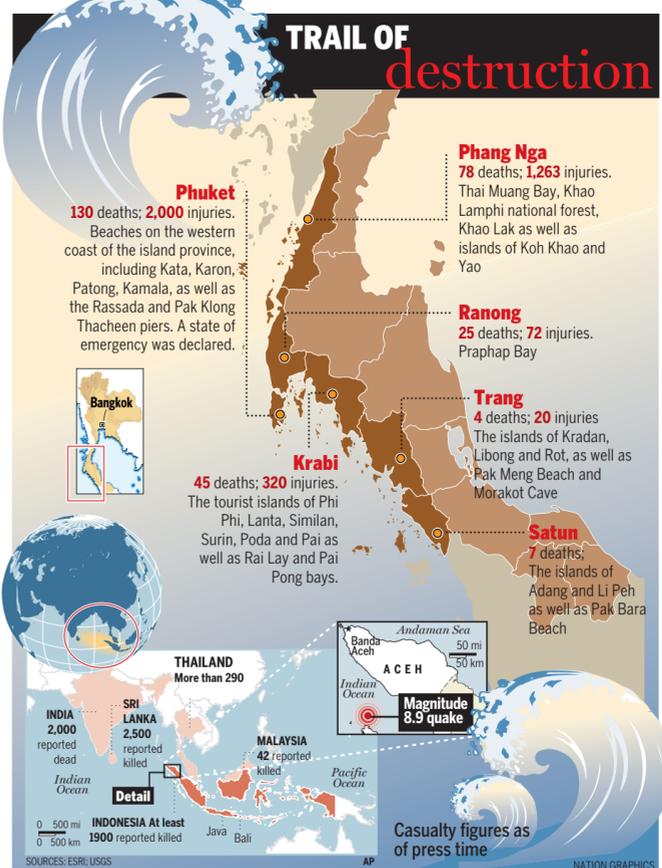
Most of those killed were swept out to sea as they picnicked at the popular Batu Ferringhi beach on the resort island of Penang.

Burma Dead: 10

The tsunami, which drove through the Andaman Sea, destroyed a bridge in Kawthaung, southeast Burma, killing 10 people. A number of fishing trawlers are missing at sea.

The Maldives Dead: 10

The Maldives has declared a state of emergency as the tsunami flooded two-thirds of its capital.



INSIDE

2A: Thailand's worst quake in 459 years

2A: Islanders' phone lines down

2A: Emergency phone numbers

4A: 'Big money' damage to Phuket

4A: Six worst-hit provinces in South

4A: Navy leads island evacuations, searches

5A: In Sri Lanka: 'People have fled to higher ground'

6A: In Maldives: 'Suddenly there was water up to my neck'

7A: In India: 'We had to leave everything and run'

14A: There was 'water where the sky should be'

See Eyes [4A]

■ Due to the tragedy, our Trends back page has been replaced by a photo-feature today.