

Disease starting to kill in Aceh: Red Crescent

AFP, Banda Aceh

Disease and illness are starting to claim lives in the tsunami-ravaged Indonesian province of Aceh, the leader of Indonesia's Red Crescent relief team here said Saturday.

Relief groups have warned repeatedly the Indonesian death toll from Sunday's tsunami could rise dramatically past the government's estimate of up to 100,000 due to survivors not having access to medical treatment.

And while no major epidemics have been detected and the destroyed medical infrastructure is slowly being rebuilt in the capital of Banda Aceh, people are starting to die from diseases such as pneumonia and skin infections.

"Many victims survived the flooding but they suffered lung diseases because they swallowed foreign particles," Indonesian Red Crescent team leader for Aceh Agoes Kooshartoro told AFP.

"Over the past five days many people have died because of this. They survived the waves but they died of infections. There are many stories like that and we have seen such incidents."

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) communications director John Budd told AFP on Friday that the medical system in Aceh had collapsed, with just one very basic hospital functioning in Banda Aceh.

A WEEK AFTER TSUNAMI

Asia struggles with an unimaginable disaster

AFP, Colombo

At 0758 local time last Sunday, the Earth's crust deep under the sea off the west coast of Indonesia's Aceh province shifted, violently lifting the seabed by some 15 metres.

The seismic thrust, the world's biggest in 40 years measuring 9.0 on the Richter scale, sent shockwaves through the Indian Ocean, unleashing tsunamis speeding at up to 700 kilometres per hour in every direction.

Over the next few hours giant walls of water up to 10 metres high smashed into coastlines around Asia.

First Indonesia's Sumatra island, then India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands were deluged. Towering tidal waves also battered Thailand's southwest coast and resort islands, mainland India, Malaysia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. Six hours later they even hit Africa.

No-one saw them coming. It was the world's fourth largest earthquake since 1900 and the

largest since 1964. The biggest tsunami disaster ever.

A week later the toll is staggering. More than 125,000 confirmed dead, many thousands more missing and injured and up to five million left homeless. The death toll is expected to rise still further.

United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan called it "an unprecedented global catastrophe" which called for "an unprecedented global response."

Behind each statistic was a tale of human tragedy; six-month-old Melina Heppell plucked by the waves from the desperate grasp of her father in Thailand, fisherman A. Ravi who watched from his boat as the waves wiped out his family and village in India's badly-hit Tamil Nadu state.

Eyewitnesses in each country told terrifying tales. Water drained from the beaches, leaving fish flapping on the shore, then came a moment of mysterious calm before raging walls of water hurled themselves at land, picking up people, uprooting trees and buildings.

"An absolutely massive wave came," said British tourist Alex Dee on popular Thai tourist island Phuket. "People were running up into the jungle, into the mountains, running for their lives."

"People were screaming and kids were screaming all over the place, screaming 'help, help.' And after a few minutes you didn't hear the kids any more," said Czech supermodel Petra Nemcova who clung to a palm tree for eight hours in the devastated Thai resort of Khao Lak.

Most people had no chance. "It was as if God had unleashed his anger on the people," said Haji Ali, in the flattened Indonesian town of Paton Labu, close to Bireuen on Aceh's northern coast.

In many places the scale of devastation was all too apparent. At the Sofitel Magic Lagoon resort in Khao Lak, over 250 mainly European guests are missing after the waves reduced it to rubble. A Colombo to Galle train packed with 1,500 passengers that became a tomb in Sri Lanka when the sea flipped it over like a toy.

From Phang Nga, Thailand, to Tamil Nadu, India, the distressing scenes were the same. Bloating and bloodied bodies strewn everywhere, cooking under tropical sun amidst the twisted wreckage of homes and cars. Makeshift morgues overflowed with corpses. Everywhere the stench of death.

For days there was an eerie silence from the port city of Banda Aceh on Sumatra, closest to the quake's epicentre. When reports began emerging the grim picture was of the largest devastation yet and tens of thousands more lives lost.

Amidst the utter despair, there were miracles too.

A little girl was rescued after she clung to a broken door for two days in the Indian Ocean. A 20-day-old baby floated on a mattress to safety on Malaysia's Penang island and a six-year-old Taiwanese girl washed into a tree where she clung for her life.

But the miracles were few.



A Thai couple hug each other during a cremation ceremony for one of their relatives who was killed by Sunday's tsunami in Thap Lamu, about 900 km south of Bangkok.

PHOTO: AP



Fireworks light the sky over the Champs Elysees Avenue in Paris where thousands of people were celebrating the new year.

PHOTO: AFP



PHOTO: AFP

Tsunami survivor Bruno Gyr from Switzerland holds a candle and a flower outside a bar on Bangla Road in Phuket in New Year. Gyr who was enjoying the holiday in Phuket when the tragedy struck, lost 10 of his friends.

India, Pakistan swap list of nuke facilities

AFP, Islamabad

Nuclear rivals Pakistan and India exchanged lists of their nuclear facilities Saturday in line with a bilateral agreement to hand over such information annually on New Year's day, the foreign ministry said.

The two countries swapped the information under an agreement signed in 1999 on prohibition of attacks on each other's nuclear installations, foreign office spokesman Masood Khan said.

"Accordingly, the information on nuclear installations and facilities of both sides was exchanged today through diplomatic channels," the spokesman said in a statement.

ZARDARI SAYS

Nothing will stop my return to Pakistan

AFP, Dubai

The husband of former Pakistani prime minister Benazir Bhutto has vowed that nothing will stop him returning to his homeland following his release after eight years in jail, a newspaper reported on Saturday.

"That is not even a remote possibility, nobody can stop me from returning. I don't get stopped so easily," Asif Ali Zardari told the English language Gulf News after arriving in Dubai, where his wife is in self-imposed exile to avoid graft charges in Pakistan.

"In order of priority, first I am

here to meet my wife whom I have not seen for the last five-and-a-half years, our family will be reunited, then I will take instruction on how we should handle the future," he added.

Asked if he was prepared for a return to jail if cases are re-opened against him, he said: "In Third World countries like ours, it's a risk you must be willing to take. As for me, jail does not frighten me."

Zardari strongly denied that his release from jail was the result of any "deal".

"If I wanted to make a deal, I could have done it eight years ago," he said.

Palestinian PM accuses Israel of 'sabotaging' poll

AFP, Ramallah

Palestinian prime minister Ahmed Qorei accused Israel on Saturday of trying to "sabotage" the Palestinian elections on January 9 by launching a deadly military operation in the south of the Gaza Strip.

"I warn the world against the attempt by Israel to sabotage our presidential election," said Qorei as he laid a wreath at the grave of late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to mark the 40th anniversary of the Fatah movement.

"These crimes are taking place while the entire world is only talking of the election," he added.

Dying 'Dr Anthrax' of Iraq want to be freed

AFP, Dubai

A top female scientist from Saddam Hussein's deposed regime should be freed from detention in Iraq as she is terminally ill with cancer, a lawyer said yesterday.

Huda Salih Mahdi Ammash, accused of being a leader of Saddam's alleged biological warfare programme and dubbed "Dr Anthrax" by the tabloid press, was captured by US forces in May 2003.

Lawyer Badia Aref Ezzat, who is acting for former Iraqi deputy prime minister Tareq Aziz, called on Iraqi Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, US President George W. Bush and aid groups to "assume their responsibility and free her".

New Year begins as world mourns tsunami victims

BBC NEWS ONLINE

Nations around the world have been marking the start of 2005 but celebrations have been restrained because of the Asian earthquake.

Along the coast of Thailand, locals and tourists held candles and white roses in vigils marking the tragedy.

In Paris, strips of black cloth hung along the central Champs-Elysees, and other European cities donated their fireworks fund to the relief effort.

In Indonesia, the country worst-hit country, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono cancelled official celebrations in the capital, Jakarta, and used his annual address to call for national unity.

In resorts on Thailand's Phuket

island, staff and customers broke off their parties for a candlelight vigil at midnight.

One bar, the Tiger Discotheque roared back into life within sight of the shore where waves crashed in six days before.

In Sydney spectacular fireworks on the famous Harbour Bridge were preceded by a minute's silence.

Official celebrations were cancelled in India and Sri Lanka. In Delhi the lights in the presidential palace were extinguished, and Sri Lanka called a national day of mourning.

China's state broadcaster cancelled its New Year gala programme, while in Malaysia people packed churches and mosques for special prayers.

In Turkey plans to hold a huge party in Istanbul's Taksim square were called off by the city's mayor.

Many European nations flew flags at half-mast.

In London, a two-minute silence preceded a huge fireworks display attended by an estimated 150,000 people along the River Thames.

Goran Persson, the prime minister of Sweden, from where as many as 2,500 tourists are still missing, said: "Never has the step into a new year felt heavier."

In New York, a minute's silence was observed in Times Square to honour the earthquake victims. The city's mayor, Michael Bloomberg said the start of the new year was a time "to recognise how lucky we are".

5 new countries join UNSC

PTI, United Nations

Five countries, including Japan and Denmark, on Saturday joined the 15-member United Nations Security Council as non-permanent members for a two-year term, replacing Pakistan and four other nations.

Japan, Argentina, Denmark, Greece and Tanzania replace Pakistan, Angola, Chile, Germany and Spain, which retired after completing their two-year term on December 31, 2004.

The Council has five permanent members - the United States, Britain, Russia, France and China and ten non-permanent members, five of whom retire each year.

The General Assembly elects the non-permanent members on regional basis.

Under the UN Charter, a country is not allowed to seek re-election immediately after completing its term.



PHOTO: AFP

The top photo shows the normalcy at Phuket's Chedi resort just before huge tsunami waves arrived and destroyed and flooded everything as seen in bottom picture, both taken on December 26, 2004.