

PHOTO: AFP

As days pass by, more and more images of the deadly tsunami waves crashing onto the shores of South East Asia are emerging. This photo taken on December 26, 2004 shows people fleeing as a tsunami wave comes crashing ashore at Koh Raya, part of Thailand's territory in the Andaman Islands and only some 23 kilometers from Phuket island, southern Thailand. The photographer who took this picture escaped without injury, but retreated at the first wave and watched as a second wave tore apart the wooden buildings, with a third and largest wave coming forward and "ripping apart the cement buildings like they were made of balsa wood". The waves apparently "continued for a good hour after, gradually getting smaller only to reveal the complete devastation left behind."

REUTERS, Banda Aceh

Eight days after a giant tsunami struck Asia, relief workers faced "absolute chaos" in Indonesia's Aceh province on Monday as a \$2 billion operation to help disaster victims fought to get off the ground.

Aid workers struggled to help thousands huddled in makeshift camps in the province in northern Sumatra and to reach remote areas after roads and airstrips were washed away.

Across southern Asia logjams began to ease at airports bursting with hundreds of tons of emergency supplies but relief workers faced a logistical nightmare in distributing them.

"It's absolute chaos," said Titon

Mitra of CARE International, which is running 14 survivor camps in Aceh.

The same bleak picture faced aid workers in Sri Lanka, the second worst-hit nation, said Margaret Wahlstrom, United Nations special envoy for tsunami relief.

The UN said 1.8 million survivors needed food in tsunami-hit areas but the world's response in money and resources gave grounds for hope as dehydration, disease and hunger threatened to add to the already huge death toll.

World Bank president James Wolfensohn said his agency could double or triple the \$250 million it has promised for regional reconstruction, and would also be looking at debt relief for the poor nations

worst affected by the disaster.

"The international system is working," UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Jan Egeland said in New York.

Hundreds of fresh foreign troops poured into Aceh in a race to stop the outbreak of killer diseases among survivors of the tsunami, triggered by a huge earthquake off Sumatra on Dec. 26.

UNICEF said it had reports of children dying of pneumonia in Aceh. Many in refugee camps were sick from a variety of ailments, as well as terrible wounds sustained when the tsunami hit.

A Health Ministry official said he had no reports of a cholera outbreak, but the risk was very high.

Peru rebels to 'surrender on Monday'

REUTERS, Lima

The leader of a 200-strong armed group that killed four policemen and seized a police station and part of a southern Peruvian town, to demand the resignation of President Alejandro Toledo, said it would hand over its weapons on Monday.

Former army Maj. Antauro Humala made his offer in a public speech in the Andean town of Andahuaylas broadcast by RPP radio after mediation by church and other officials and a pledge by Prime Minister Carlos Ferrero that they would not be hurt.

The government said it captured nine rebels.

Powell predicts Shia victory in Iraq polls

AFP, Washington

US Secretary of State Colin Powell predicted a Shi'ite victory in upcoming Iraqi elections, but moved to assuage concerns it could bolster Iranian influence inside the country.

His statements came amid growing indications that Sunni Arabs will either boycott the January 30 polls or will be prevented from taking part in it due to a spreading insurgency.

"The new government that comes into place in Baghdad, the transitional national assembly, will be majority Shia," Powell said on Sunday on NBC's "Meet the Press" show. "That's the majority of the population."

Shia Muslims make up more than 60 per cent of Iraq's population, concentrated mostly in southern and central parts of the country. Sunni Arabs, who live in central and western provinces, comprise about 20 per cent of all Iraqis.

Former Iraqi foreign minister Adnan Pachachi, who now heads the Sunni-dominated Iraqi Independent Democrats Party, called on Sunday for delaying the vote, saying elections under current circumstances "will leave a large segment of the population disenfranchised and many regions underrepresented."

India grapples with disposal of bodies

AFP, Tamil Nadu

India was battling to bury or cremate an untold number of corpses and beat aid bottlenecks Monday, as the toll from last week's massive earthquake and tsunami neared 15,300 dead and missing. Authorities stepped up relief efforts in the country's tsunami-hit areas in the south and in the far-flung Andaman islands, with the official toll rising to 9,479 dead and 5,796 missing, most presumed dead.

Cranes and bulldozers cleared collapsed dwellings and debris along India's battered southern coast and the search for bodies continued.

"The stench tells us there are many bodies under the rubble," said Lieutenant General B.S. Thakur, head of the Andaman islands' relief command.

On India's mainland, the tsunami took their greatest toll among fishing villages where many traumatised fishermen said they feared returning to sea.

"We can't go back on the beach," said a young fisherman in Kandhan Puthukuppam, in Tamil Nadu, near the former French colony of Pondicherry. "The sea was god, today it's Yaman (the god of death)."

But in battered Nagapattam in Tamil Nadu where aid has been patchy, some fishermen took their nets out to sea to fish again.

"I'm surviving on coconuts. My son and wife died and I need to live. The only staple food I can have is fish," Mani Vannan said.

Fearing epidemics, volunteers liberally sprinkled bleach to disinfect streets and relief camps as trucks ferried clothes, cooking utensils, blankets and other goods to survivors still reeling from losing relatives and homes.

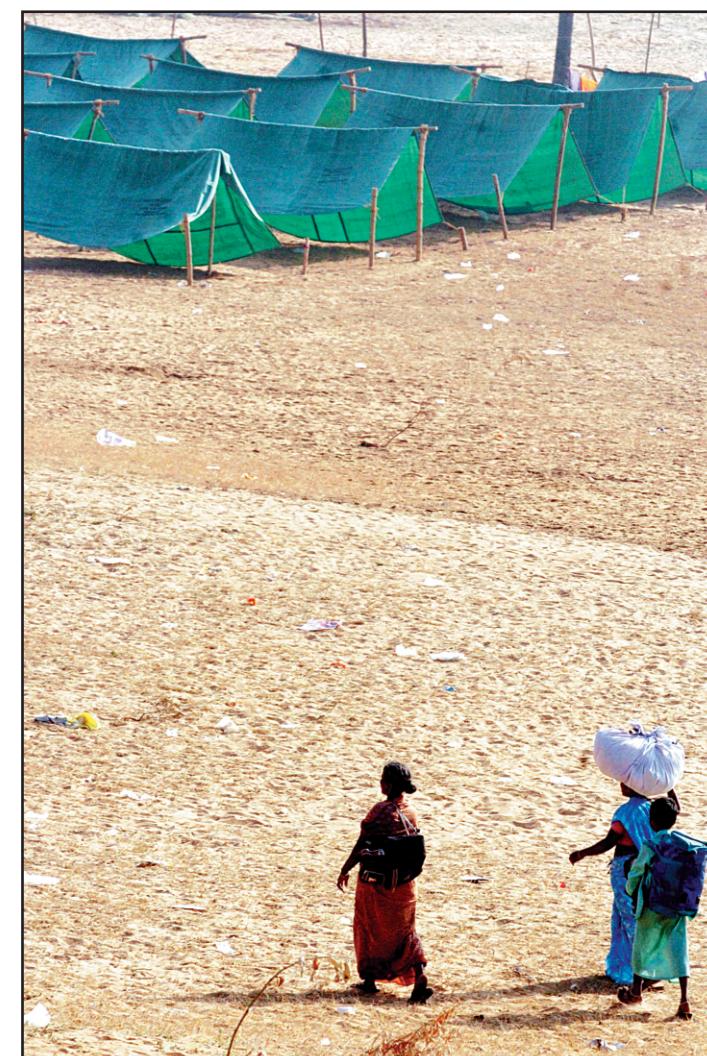


PHOTO: AFP

Indian tsunami victims return to their temporary tents at a camp for displaced people after collecting belongings they salvaged from their devastated Therukapattu village some 50 km south of Madras yesterday.



A US soldier looks out at armored vehicles carrying out an ammunition test in an arid area on the outskirts of the northern restive city of Mosul, 370km of Baghdad on Sunday. A new contingent of US troops has been sent to Mosul to help boost security ahead of nationwide elections.

PHOTO: AFP