

News Round-up

*Tsunami*versary...

It's almost a year since that deadly tragedy struck the coastal communities around the Indian Ocean, the 26 December 2004 tsunami, triggered by a gigantic underwater earthquake off north Sumatra, claiming more than 224,000 lives and displacing more than 1.6 mn people in countries ranging from Indonesia to Somalia.

Few would wish to remember the disaster, but, equally, few can forget it. And several people and groups are set to commemorate the event with first-anniversary memorial services.

Thailand, whose official death toll from the tsunami is 5,395, seems to have taken the lead, offering to fund flights and hotel rooms for relatives of the 2,000 foreign tourists killed in the disaster.

The Thai government said it will also throw in two nights of hotel accommodation in southwest Thailand.

Already, nearly 3,000 foreign tsunami survivors and relatives of tsunami victims have told the Thai government they will attend the

planned beachside memorials.

Over 14,000 guests are expected to attend the remembrance ceremonies, to be held during 25-27 December in the Andaman coastal provinces of Thailand.

Five different locations are being offered to attend the memorial services, which will be held between 9.30 and 10.30 am at Patong Beach and Kamala Beach in Phuket province, Bang Niang and Nam Khem villages in Phang Nga province, and Phi Phi Island in Krabi.

Apart from survivors and immediate relatives of tsunami victims, 60 heads of State and other VIP guests are expected to show up for the ceremonies. Around 4,000 hotel rooms,

mostly in Phuket and Phang Nga provinces have been reserved for the guests.

Additionally, some local Thai residents' houses have been prepared as alternative accommodation for those who prefer 'home stay'.

Arty offerings

Twelve Nordic entries have been sent in for the official Thai tsunami memorial design competition.

Finland has submitted seven entries, leading the Nordic entries. **Sweden** comes second with three entries, followed by **Denmark**, with two. Norway has not entered the competition.

The overall leader in terms of proposals is the US with 104 entries, followed by Thailand with 70 and

the UK with 25. So far artists from 42 countries have submitted design ideas for the memorial, which will be erected in Khao Lak.

Down under too

The Government of **Australia** is pitching in as well. It has offered to assist the immediate family members of Australians who died as a result of the Indian Ocean tsunami.

It will help with reasonable travel and accommodation costs incurred in travelling to formally tsunami-affected areas to commemorate the first anniversary.

One year later...

Nearly one year after last December's deadly tsunami, the people of Indonesia's Aceh province are beginning to rebuild and recreate lives and livelihoods—with an emphasis on building for a better future, reports global humanitarian agency Church World Service.

With so many fishing boats lost to the tsunami, a return to productive fishing is fundamental to Aceh's recovery. And that is happening, says the Church World Service.

Like others still displaced and living in tents or settlement barracks, Aceh fishermen who lost

homes and boats in the tsunami have been longing to return and to have their own homes again.

Orphan hopes

Malaysia has launched a project to bring hope to 800 children orphaned by the December 2004 tsunami.

The Pesantren Terpadu Al Fauzul Kabir Religious School in Kota Jantho, the capital of the Aceh Besar hilly region, in Sumatra, Indonesia, will be rebuilt soon to accommodate orphans caused by the tsunami last year.

The reconstruction of the school will be funded by Malaysia and is expected to benefit about 800 children who became orphans following the tsunami. The integrated religious school's headmaster, Zahari Yusuf, 32, said the contribution from Malaysia would comprise three hostel blocks for boys and girls, a dining hall, a multipurpose hall and buildings for classrooms and laboratories.

Recovery news

Meanwhile, as the first anniversary approaches, the development, advocacy and relief agency Oxfam International is inviting reporters to view progress at its key recovery programmes.

Oxfam is offering journalists an opportunity to view the progress being made in some of the hardest-hit areas where the group is working.

Much of Oxfam's work is now focused on the long-term recovery of devastated communities in Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and southern India.

Following are some of the areas of focus

Oxfam has developed over the past year, which journalists are invited to visit:

Cash-for-Work Recovery Programmes: Oxfam is helping people rebuild communities by developing cash-for-work programmes that will restore livelihoods like fishing, agriculture and salt production.

Shelter: Oxfam continues to build shelters in the hardest-hit areas. In **Sri Lanka** alone, more than 3,700

shelters have been built.

Marginalized Communities: Oxfam is committed to delivering aid to the most vulnerable populations affected by the tsunami, such as women or low-caste manual labourers, and has created financing tools and other recovery programmes to support the infrastructure for long-term growth.

Simulation project

Researchers in **India** will start a project next year, hoping to estimate, using computer simulation, the impact of a possible tsunami within minutes of an earthquake.

Such simulations will help India put together a national survival plan in the event of a tsunami, minimizing loss of life and property.

"Tsunamis have been rare and sporadic, but we need to understand the common

factors of all the occurrences.

Earthquake-induced tsunamis hit India in 1881, 1941 and 1945, and one caused by a volcanic eruption in Indonesia came in 1883. Indian literature and recent archaeological finds also suggest tsunamis had occurred in the region even 2,000 years ago," K.S. Krishna, of the government's National Institute of Oceanography, who is co-ordinating the project, told the Associated Press.

The findings would be part of India's upcoming coastal hazard preparedness plan that would also include early warning and crisis management measures for storm surges, underwater mudslides, volcanic eruptions, coastal erosions, harmful algae blooms and oil spills.

India is also building a tsunami warning centre in the southern city of Hyderabad at a cost of US\$28 million, which it expects to open by September 2007.

India has a coastline of 7,500 kilometres, along which more than 250 million people live. The December 2004 tsunami killed 10,749 people in India.

Another 5,640 people are listed as missing but are presumed dead. At least 2.7 million people were affected.