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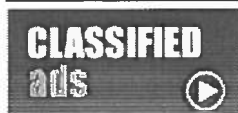
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Indonesia's second tsunami disaster shows need for warning system

PANGANDARAN, West Java (AP): Within minutes of the earthquake, regional tsunami centers warned it had the potential to send a deadly wave speeding toward Indonesia. But the country had no way of passing the information onto those in its path until it was too late.

Indonesia was the worst hit by the 2004 tsunami, and Monday's disaster shows how unprepared the sprawling island nation remains in dealing with the threat of tsunami triggered by the awesome seismic forces that lie beneath it.

Most people at this devastated beach resort did not feel the 7.7-magnitude earthquake and few noticed the ocean receding -- a typical phenomenon before a tsunami -- because the tide was already low and the effect was not especially pronounced, local residents and tourists said Tuesday.

"The police and local officials did not give us any warning whatsoever about the tsunami," said Supratu, a fisherman.

"Suddenly this big wall of water appeared and I started screaming and running."

The earthquake struck at 3:19 p.m., and the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center issued an alert 17 minutes later saying a tsunami was possible. The first of several waves hit Java's southern coast at around 4:15 p.m. -- nearly an hour after the temblor, witnesses said.

Indonesia initially registered the quake at under magnitude 6, and by the time government scientists realized its true power it was too late to warn government offices across the danger zone, said scientist Fauzi.

We tried to radio them "but there was no way we had the time," he said.

But even if they'd succeeded, without an automated system in place to pass the message on to villagers via loudspeakers on beaches or mobile phone text messages, the evacuation of significant numbers of

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people would have been unlikely.

The tsunami killed at least 339 people and destroyed hundreds of homes.

With international help, Indonesia has begun installing a tsunami warning system off Aceh province on Sumatra island, where more than 130,000 of the some 216,000 victims of the 2004 tsunami lived. It plans to roll out the system across the country of 18,000 islands by 2009, officials said Tuesday.

"Setting one up is not as easy as simply lifting your hand," Coordinating Minister for People's Welfare Aburizal Bakrie told *The Associated Press*. "We are preparing one, but it is not finished yet."

In Sumatra, two buoys have been placed in the ocean containing equipment able to detect whether a tsunami has been triggered and transmit the information to a land station. However, sirens on beaches or in villages have yet to be set up there either. (***)

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