

Far and wide they remember their darkest day

Panic as quakes spark fears of a new disaster

SAPA-AP AND REUTERS
Bali, Indonesia

Sirens sent thousands of people fleeing the coast in Indonesia's largest-ever tsunami drill while others prayed at mass graves, chimed temple bells and lit candles two years after devastating waves claimed 230 000 lives across Asia.

In a reminder yesterday of ongoing threats to the seismically charged region, a 7.1 magnitude quake off south-western Taiwan briefly sparked fears of another killer tsunami.

However, the US Geological Survey reported two quakes — one measuring 7.1 and the other 7.

In Pingtung county, Taiwan, one person died when a furniture shop collapsed. Three others had to be rescued.

Taiwanese TV reports showed people in the city of Pingtung rushing into the streets in panic.

High-rise buildings across the island were rattled and phone services in southern Taiwan were disrupted.

Yesterday, the anniversary of the tsunami two years ago, Sharon Howard, whose fiancé and two children were among those killed, was one of the survivors to return to honour lost loved ones.

"I miss them. They were my life," the British tourist said, tears pouring down her cheeks after attending a memorial ceremony on Khao Lak beach in Thailand.

"I wish I could turn back time and they could all come back."

In various tsunami-ravaged regions, mourners observed a moment of silence at the exact time the waves crashed to

shore, while others lit incense on the beach, offered prayers and threw flowers into the sea.

But along with the commemorations another push was under way, with governments, volunteers and residents taking steps to protect against future tsunamis.

In Sri Lanka, the first of 100 warning towers were erected on a beach.

Volunteers in Malaysia replanted mangroves, which some say act as a natural protective barrier against killer waves.

Indonesia said its tsunami drill on the resort island of Bali — unaffected by the 2004 disaster — was aimed at raising awareness and testing technology deployed in the past two years.

Warnings were sent from the capital Jakarta to radios along the beach. Sirens wailed, sending crowds — many of them schoolchildren — briskly walking inland.

"The biggest challenge is working with the people to make them aware," said German geologist Harald Spahn, who is helping Indonesia to set up its alert network.

In the hard-hit Aceh region on Indonesia's Sumatra island, Zaldi Setiawan focused on honouring the memory of his two children, who were ripped from his hands by the force of the waves.

In Sri Lanka, temple bells chimed to mark the exact time the first wave crashed ashore, and all cars and trucks came to a standstill for two minutes to remember the 35 000 who died.

Ceremonies were small and sombre in southern India, where 18 000 were killed or missing.



TRIBUTE: College students make a sand sculpture at Marina beach to commemorate the second anniversary of the Indian Ocean tsunami in the southern Indian city of Chennai.

PICTURE: REUTERS

The tsunami generated an unprecedented outpouring of generosity, with donor pledges reaching about \$13-billion (R91-billion).

But many of the homeless complain they are stuck with poorly built structures that leak, are termite-infested or located in flood zones.

Corruption has also marred the process, with several NGOs

forced to delay projects or rebuild homes after contractors and suppliers ran off with the funds.

Seven Western nations have sent a letter to the police in Thailand saying that up to 60% of the \$1.8-million set aside to help identify the dead in Thailand appeared to have been misused.

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MOURNING: This Indian woman lost her son in the 2004 tsunami.