

## Excerpt



A destroyed village near the coast in Aceh.

## EDITORIAL Lessons to be learned from the tsunamis

AT LEAST 23,000 dead in half a dozen countries as of yesterday evening, and counting. Hundreds of thousands injured; more than a million rendered homeless. Entire villages washed away and several cities crippled. Half a dozen countries hit. Such was the mind-boggling scale of the earthquake-triggered tsunami, a seismic sea wave, that smashed into coastlines across South and Southeast Asia on Sunday.

Just how vast and severe its impact is something we will only learn slowly, over the next few days, as the seas return to normal, rescuers are able to reach remote areas and the damage can be more accurately assessed.

For smaller countries like the Maldives and Sri Lanka, the economic devastation will be considerable, with destroyed infrastructure taking at least several months to repair or replace. For larger economies like India, Indonesia and Thailand, the economic damage, according to economists, will be one-off in nature and contained.

This might help explain why the region's stock markets have largely shrugged off this catastrophe. While the Thai market recorded a slight decline yesterday, the markets in Indonesia and India – perhaps perversely – rose, while those elsewhere in the region were mostly unchanged.

But this should not take away from the enormity of the human and social costs affecting coastal communities around the region. Tragically, we now know – too late – that much of the devastation, at least to human life, could have been prevented, had there been early warning systems in place.

The US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration centre in Honolulu revealed that it actually detected the quake off the coast of Indonesia that caused the tsunami almost immediately after it happened, but was unable to get the word out to the affected areas, because none of them had tsunami warning systems, or tidal gauges, in place. Even as little as 15 minutes notice would have saved thousands of lives.

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Vibrant economy among PM Lee's chief goals

DECEMBER 4, 2004

CAO done in by great expectations