

REPORTER'S NOTEBOOK

Sunda Strait: Indonesia's poor bear the brunt of deadly tsunami

Thursday 10 January 2019, by [LLEWELLYN Aisyah](#), [McBRIDE Rob](#) (Date first published: 29 December 2018).

Survivors in the district of Banten begin rebuilding their shattered lives amid calls for better tsunami early warning system.

Banten, Indonesia - Ahmad Hidayat's smile seemed strangely incongruous given the mess that lay around him.

I have seen that smile before in Indonesia - a natural response, no matter the situation, maybe out of innate shyness or deference when talking to a stranger. And here, standing beside the dripping pile of clothes, home appliances, children's books and toys, Ahmad grinned broadly.

Helped by his wife and his uncle, he was busy dragging out the waterlogged contents of his home to see what could be salvaged.

The building was swamped on the night of December 22, when tsunami waves believed to have been triggered by an erupting volcano surged over the thin strip of beach that separated Ahmad's home in the village of Sambolo from the sea.

At least Ahmad's roof was intact, giving him the chance to dry out some of his goods.

His neighbours' homes were missing roofs altogether, so their possessions were likely to stay wet until the end of the rainy season, still many weeks away.

Behind Ahmad's smile was the pain of knowing just how vulnerable people were here, with the monster of Anak Krakatoa volcano rumbling just over the horizon.

"This is my home. I have no other place to go," he said with a shrug. "But if I had money I'd buy somewhere safer to live."

'No warning'

For many people living along the Sunda Strait, which separates the islands of Java and Sumatra, the sea is their only livelihood.

From the fishermen to the family-owned resorts and restaurants that dotted the shoreline, people have no choice but to resume their previous ways of life.

"There was no warning at all," said Babay Halimatusadiah, the owner of a small food stall. "It happened suddenly."

She was standing beside her husband in the little food stall they own, set back about 100 metres

from the beach in Carita district. On the day the tsunami hit, they were serving evening diners at the same spot.

Indonesia raises alert, reroutes flights around erupting volcano (1:43)

Two days after the disaster, they were already back in business. The couple, however, said they would be a lot happier with a better early warning system.

"I hope the government can use newer technology," Halimatusadiah's husband Hasbialoh Asnawi told Al Jazeera.

"Because we're afraid there's going to be worse in future."

The lack of a tsunami warning has sparked a fierce debate in Indonesia about the country's preparedness for such disasters, given how prone the sprawling archipelago is to earthquakes and destructive waves.

Much of the current warning system was put in place after the so-called Boxing Day tsunami of 2004 - a far more devastating event that struck more than a dozen countries along the shores of the Indian Ocean. It claimed an estimated 200,000 lives in Indonesia alone.

'Still afraid'

Coincidentally, the 14th anniversary of the 2004 tsunami fell on Wednesday, as the clean up from the latest disaster continued.

On both occasions, the full force a tsunami can unleash could be seen in the damage done to the bigger, more solidly built homes and blocks in holiday resorts.

This time too, whole walls were swept away, exposing the rooms, furniture and toilet fixtures inside.

And then, as now, it is the poorer, more vulnerable communities who bore the brunt.

Stretches of coastline now stripped clean of any signs of life were once thriving communities of simple huts made from bamboo, thatch and metal sheeting.

The piles of debris swept back 100-200 metres inland were the only reminders of the people who have been killed, injured and displaced.

In the town of Labuan, a couple of kilometres inland, thousands of homeless people were waiting to see when and how they can return home. The area is only a few metres above the sea level, but it was enough to offer a level of security for people who have experienced what the sea is capable of.

In one of the temporary camps that have sprung up, Watinah - the wife of a fisherman who now has no way to support herself and her three children - was watching the monotonous rain outside.

"I don't know how long we are going to stay here," she said. "We haven't been back to see the condition of our home because we're still afraid."

Just at that moment, more bad news arrived. Al Jazeera producer Syarina's device began beeping. The alert level on Anak Krakatoa had just been raised to Level 3, one below the maximum 4.

The people have reason to fear. the Anak Krakatoa still rumbles ominously.

Rob McBride

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• SOURCE: AL JAZEERA NEWS. 29 Dec 2018:

<https://www.aljazeera.com/blogs/asia/2018/12/indonesia-poor-bear-brunt-deadly-tsunami-181229081508335.html>

Caught in Indonesia's tsunami - stories of survival and death

Fishing villages along the western coastline were engulfed by surging waves following the eruption of a volcano.

South Lampung, Indonesia - The wedding party was in full swing when Andi Karim heard the sounds of fierce waves slamming the shore of his village in western Indonesia.

The 32-year-old's instinct kicked in immediately, prompting him to spring towards his home on the waterfront where his 33-year-old wife Putri Anita and his five-year-old son and three-month-old daughter were sleeping.

"When I got inside the house, I saw that the waves had knocked a cupboard on top of my family. My wife was holding it up so they didn't get crushed," Karim told Al Jazeera.

His family was alive - but trapped. The small plywood cupboard had fallen on their mosquito net, pinning them to the bed.

"My wife was holding the cupboard so it didn't fall on the baby, but she couldn't get them out from under the net," Karim said.

"I saw in her eyes that she was just waiting to die."

Karim managed to rescue his family from their house before another violent wave bore down on the village in South Lampung [Teguh Harahap/Al Jazeera]

Rajabasa village had just been hit by a powerful tsunami that on Saturday night battered the Lampung and Banten provinces on the Indonesian islands of Sumatra and Java, respectively.

[WATCH: Indonesia raises alert, reroutes flights around erupting volcano (1:44)]

The huge waves are widely believed to have been triggered by an underwater landslide caused by an eruption from the neighbouring Anak Krakatoa volcano which sits in the Sunda Strait.

At least 430 people have been killed, more than 150 are still missing, and thousands have been displaced.

Karim managed to lift the cupboard off his family and get them out of the house as another violent wave bore down on the village in South Lampung.

"By the time we went outside, the water was waist deep," he said. "If I hadn't got there in time and been so close, my wife and children would be dead now."

Surging wall of water

On the same night, some two kilometres away in the coastal village of Way Muli, Sabandin Bin Hasimun was at his neighbour's house.

"I heard water rushing up the beach, which was unusual, so I went outside to see what was happening. A second wave came on the horizon and it was so big," the 38-year-old told Al Jazeera.

"My neighbour immediately shouted, 'It's a tsunami'."

Bin Hasimun immediately started running down the waterfront in the direction of his family home, where his wife, Munajah Binti Nurdin, 31, and their two youngest sons - Muhammad Rifki Al Lapis, two, and Ahmad Dinata Adi Saputra, eight - were all asleep.

But he couldn't make it.

"The wave hit me and I went under," he recalled. "I just curled up in a ball and put my hands over my head."

Bin Hasimun was washed against a low wall next to the main road. He managed to grab hold of it. "That's what saved me being swept out to sea," he said.

When the water subsided and his gaze turned towards his house, he saw that it had completely disappeared - gone by the surging wall of water.

"I thought another wave would come so I ran away," said Bin Hasimun, who eventually managed to scramble to higher ground.

Sabandin lost his wife and two-year-old son when the tsunami destroyed their home [Teguh Harahap/Al Jazeera]

The next morning, the body of his two-year-old son was found on the beach. It took until Tuesday for his wife's remains to be recovered at Kunjir village, around a kilometre away.

Remarkably, his eight-year-old son had woken up by the sound of the sea and fled the home before the waves came. "He took the initiative to save his own life," said Bin Hasimun.

His eldest son, 11-year-old Ahmad Dwi Hadi Saputra, was at a football camp in the provincial capital of Bandar Lampung when the tsunami hit and is now being looked after by his football coach. He has yet to be told that his mother and youngest brother perished in the deadly waves.

Infrastructure risks

Out of the 108 tsunami victims in South Lampung, 22 lived in Way Muli.

Eddie Dempsey, a lecturer in structural geology at the School of Environmental Sciences, University of Hull told Al Jazeera that the waves and the water are in fact the least hazardous part of tsunamis.

"Tsunamis really are terrible events ... The most dangerous part is the debris and sediment picked up by the wave which is churned around like in a cement mixer," Dempsey said.

[WATCH: Indonesia raises alert, reroutes flights around erupting volcano (1:44)]

"In addition to that, fallen electricity cables and burning fuel add to the hazards. As with most geohazards, most of the risks actually come from the infrastructure we have built around ourselves."

Rescuers are continuing to find bodies along the coastlines of Lampung and Banten and the burial process is ongoing.

Helicopters, drones and sniffer dogs have also been deployed to find survivors and victims in remote areas, as recovery teams scramble to distribute much-needed aid to those sheltering in mountainous makeshift camps amid official warnings to stay away from the coast due to the prospect of the rumbling Anak Krakatoa causing another tsunami.

On Wednesday, Bin Hasimun attended his local mosque where he was comforted by friends as paramedics unloaded the body of his wife on a stretcher so that local residents could say prayers before her burial.

Her body, almost unrecognisable due to decomposition caused by the water, had to be wrapped first in a traditional white Muslim funeral shroud and then in a plastic body bag to avoid it leaking. The prayers had to be cut short as the smell of death in the mosque was overwhelming and caused members of the crowd to cough.

Bin Hasimun was urged by concerned friends not to attend the burial for fear that it would be too upsetting.

Having lost his wife of 13 years, he says he's feeling "lost". For the moment, he is staying with family friends on higher ground in Way Muli, but is too shocked to know what to do next.

"I've no idea where we're going to live," he said. "I just can't picture the future."

[Video: Indonesia: Where There's Smoke]

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SOURCE: AL JAZEERA NEWS. 28 Dec 2018:

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia-pacific/2018/12/caught-indonesia-tsunami-stories-survival-death-181228091331076.html>
