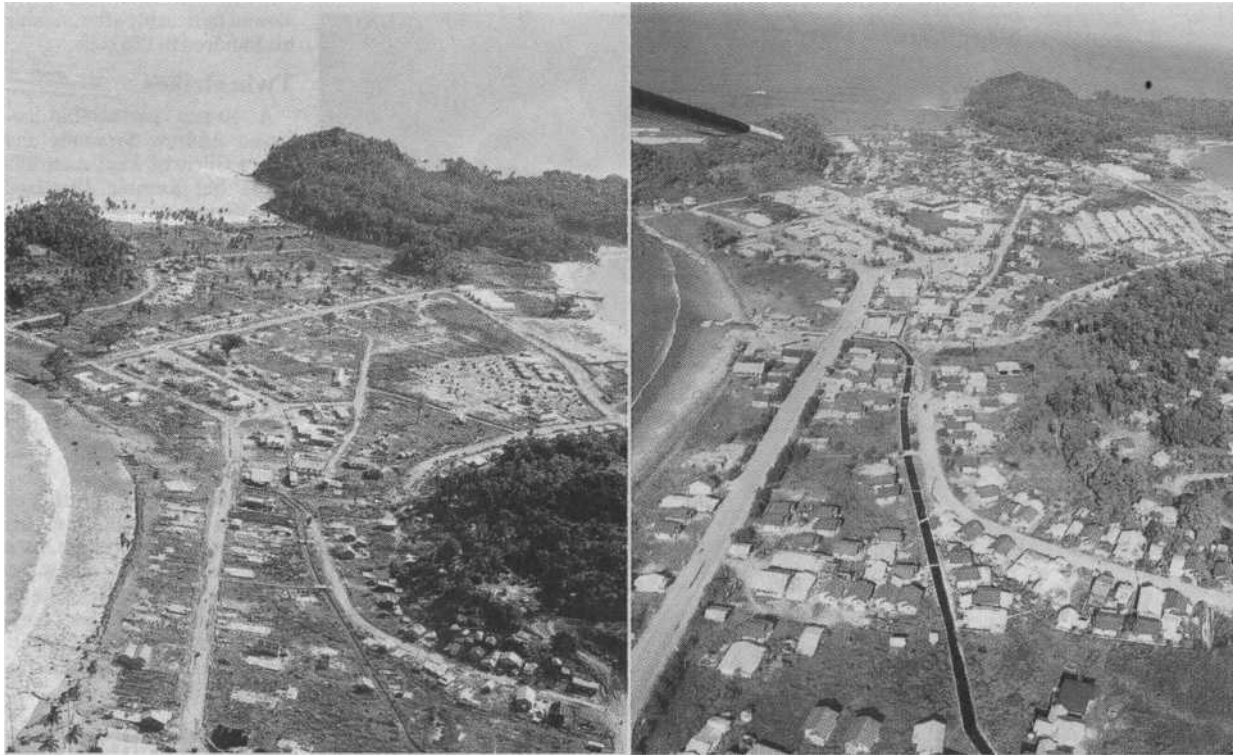


The Hindu, Chennai, 27 Dec 2007

## Look back in terror

Asia remembers tsunami victims three years on



**THEN AND NOW:** Aerial views of Calang in Aceh province, taken on August 3, 2005 (left) and the same area taken on December 14, 2007. Archipelagic Indonesia was the nation worst hit by the earthquake-triggered tsunami in 2004, which claimed 1,68,000 lives in the Aceh province. - PHOTOS: AFP

**CALANG** Three years after Indian Ocean nations were lashed by massive tsunamis, sombre ceremonies were held on Wednesday to recall those lost in one of the worst natural catastrophes in modern times.

Here in Indonesia, mass prayers were held outdoors and at mosques across Aceh, the staunchly Muslim province at the northern tip of Sumatra island where 168,000 lives were claimed by the walls of water.

The toll here was more than half the 220,000 killed in a dozen nations, including Sri Lanka, India and Thailand, with thousands of unidentified victims buried in mass graves hastily dug in the disaster's aftermath.

Wednesday's main ceremony was held outdoors at a village on the outskirts of Calang, one of the areas of Aceh obliterated in the disaster.

"I came here to pray to-

gether with other residents. I pray for my wife and my child who died in the tsunami, hoping they are now resting in peace," said Alimudin, a 61-year-old retired local government official.

Aceh Governor Irwandi Yusuf, a former rebel fighter, told about 1,000 residents, schoolchildren and officials that he hoped "we can learn from the tragedy to improve our piety towards God."

"Let us leave behind all our tears and work together to rebuild Aceh, hoping that one day we can repay our 'debt' to the international community," he said.

The international community pledged more than \$7 billion to help reconstruction in Aceh, which is well on track towards completion.

Mr. Yusuf, who was detained in a jail that was destroyed by the tsunami, was elected in December last year following a historic peace

pact spurred on by the disaster that saw a 29-year separatist conflict end.

Also in Indonesia, a dramatic drill simulating a tsunami strike was held in Java's coastal province of Banten involving 9,000 residents.

The simulation, designed to test a tsunami warning system gradually being rolled out, saw hundreds of students, along with residents clutching children, rush to higher ground assailed by wailing sirens.

"This country is vulnerable to tsunami threats. Let us pray to God for this country to be kept safe from tsunamis," President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono said after observing the exercise.

Sri Lanka, which suffered 31,000 deaths, marked the anniversary by opening a bridge in the southern coastal town of Matara, gifted by South Korea.

President Mahinda Raja-

pakse observed two minutes of silence at 9:25 a.m., the time when the first giant waves lashed the coastline in a disaster that also displaced a million people on the island.

Sri Lanka's post-tsunami reconstruction work has been dogged by corruption and renewed fighting that has blocked relief to survivors, according to watchdogs.

In India, where more than 16,000 people died, thousands of fishing families who survived the avalanche of water gathered on beaches to remember the dead. Parents who lost children thronged beaches and fishing hamlets in India's worst-hit Nagapattinam district, where 6,500 people died in Tamil Nadu.

"The memorial today is just a symbol for me where all of us collect to grieve together," said Kaveri, 37, who lost a son and daughter when the tsunami hit the fishing hamlet of Keechankuppam.—AFP