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INDIA NEWS | Updated April 11, 2012, 9:35 a.m. ET

India Cancels Tsunami Alerts

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A Wall Street Journal Roundup

India withdrew tsunami warnings and alerts it issued on Wednesday following an 8.6 magnitude earthquake off the western coast of Sumatra in Indonesia.



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Jagadeesh NV/European Pressphoto Agency

People stand outside their office building after tremors were felt in the southern Indian city of Bangalore, April 11, 2012.

The website of India's National Centre for Ocean Information Services had earlier carried a warning for the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Indian Ocean, where a tsunami with waves as high as 6.3 meters was feared. The warning urged people to move inland toward higher ground and advised vessels to move into deep ocean territory.

Several hours after the earthquake, it became clear that no tsunami was going to hit the Indian coast. The possibility of a

tsunami triggered warning systems that were put in place after the 2004 tsunami that devastated the region.

In a statement, India's Home Ministry said it had asked the chief secretaries of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and all east coast states to advise fishermen not to venture out to sea. Teams from the National Disaster Response Force were placed on standby in case they were needed to carry out emergency relief efforts, the agency said.

In the Andaman city of Port Blair, a siren blared on top of the local secretariat building to warn locals of a potential tsunami, according to Denis Giles, editor of the Andaman Chronicle newspaper. Nearby, defense officials patrolled coastal areas – Andaman is a military hub for India – telling people to move inland, he said.

Mr. Giles said government alerts, while effective in dense urban areas, were unlikely to reach villagers in rural areas of Andaman and Nicobar. India's national radio service isn't available in far-flung areas, he noted. "In many areas, villagers still have no idea there is a tsunami warning going on," Mr. Giles said by phone Wednesday afternoon,

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about two hours after the earthquake. He said the earthquake wasn't felt very strongly in the capital Port Blair – the biggest impact was in the Nicobar district to the south, especially in Great Nicobar Island, to north of Sumatra.

The agency had issued an "alert" – a less urgent form of guidance – for the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, advising that people avoid beaches and low-lying coastal areas and said other several others states, including Karnataka, Kerala, Orissa and Tamil Nadu should be on "watch" for further developments.

Television news channels showed police in India's southern city of Chennai in Tamil Nadu state calling on people to evacuate the coastline.

The tsunami set off an international warning system of sensors and communications relays that was put into place after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami that left close to a quarter of a million people dead.

Tremors from Wednesday afternoon's earthquake were felt across large swaths of India, including the eastern city of Kolkata and as far west as New Delhi.

The Pacific Tsunami Warning Center, which had issued a tsunami watch for countries including Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Pakistan, also cancelled its warnings. Only government authorities can place their coastlines under official alert.

A tsunami warning was issued by the Sri Lankan government. An official from the meteorological department of Bangladesh said that no tsunami warning had officially been issued, but people living on the coast were told to be alert.

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