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State gets its act together

Tamil Nadu Bureau



The Hindu Mounted Branch police were deployed at the Marina Beach in Chennai to keep public away following the tsunami s Ragu

The memories of the December 2004 Asian tsunami came flooding back across coastal Tamil Nadu on Wednesday as residents faced a threat of another tsunami, following the earthquake in Indonesia.

The Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) put the entire coastal belt of the State on 'alert' status, meaning that people should avoid going to beaches and low-lying coastal areas.

The State administration, now more experienced in tackling such a contingency, responded swiftly in alerting the administration of the districts concerned and taking precautionary steps.

As soon as news about the tsunami alert was out, Chief Minister Jayalalithaa contacted Chief Secretary D. Sarangi and instructed him to ensure that all steps were taken quickly, a senior government official said.

An emergency control room at the Commissioner of Revenue Administration office in Chepauk was activated. Senior IAS officers with experience in tsunami management were immediately sent to the office to monitor the situation along with the Commissioner.

In coastal districts, the administration sprang into action, cautioning people not to go to the beaches. Government officials and hospital authorities were kept in a state of preparedness to face any emergency, Ms. Jayalalitha said in a press release. District Collectors and Superintendents of Police had been directed to implement a contingency plan.

Just as in December 2004, tremors were first experienced by people. This time, reports of such tremors came not just from coastal areas, but also from the interior parts such as Salem, Coimbatore and Udhaga. Schools and colleges in the coastal areas abruptly reduced their working hours. Many offices and establishments allowed their employees to go home. At the Secretariat too, several employees left their offices. Many felt tremors around 4 p.m., set off by a massive aftershock.

In Nagapattinam, Cuddalore and Kanyakumari, which accounted for most of the 7,997 deaths about seven years ago, people, by and large, appeared far more composed.

In Nagapattinam, people were moved from coastal villages to tsunami housing colonies. The fishing community in Cuddalore alerted its compatriots out at sea over cellphones and asked them to return to the shore. In Kanyakumari around 3 p.m., all the shops downed shutters and tourists enjoying the beauty of Vivekananda Memorial Park returned back to the shore in boats, suspending ferry services.

On the Marina beach in Chennai, there was sound coordination among the various wings of the government, putting safety measures in place.

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