

INDONESIA DIGEST

Indonesia's complex Issues in a Nutshell

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We wish all our Muslim readers a Blessed Ramadan

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SUMATRA RATTLED BY MASSIVE EARTHQUAKES AND DAILY AFTERSHOCKS

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For Indonesia Digest**

On the eve of the Ramadan fasting month, on Wednesday, 12 September at 18.10 hrs a massive earthquake registering 7.9 on the Richter scale shook the Sumatra provinces of Bengkulu and West Sumatra causing inhabitants to scurry out of their homes fleeing to higher ground. In less than 5 minutes, TV stations around the country interrupted their broadcasts for urgent tsunami warnings issued by the Meteorological office, BMG. BMG later said that similar warnings from the US and Japan were received some 20 minutes later after the quake. The quake had its epicenter in the Indian Ocean, 159 km north-west of the city of Bengkulu.

Thankfully, after two hours, BMG retracted the tsunami warning. However, it was later known that a tsunami of three meters had in fact occurred off the coast of Bengkulu, but because the ledge facing the sea was five meters high, the tsunami did not slam inland.

In Jakarta, tremors were felt by those living in high-rise apartments above the 15th. floor, and apparently even in Singapore and Bangkok, while those of us on the ground in Jakarta had no inkling that such a massive earthquake had yet again hit Sumatra.

That evening quake was the first of a series of some 100 large and lesser aftershocks that rocked the provinces of Bengkulu , West Sumatra and adjoining Jambi province during the next six days, well into Tuesday. The large quakes were followed by tsunami warnings that triggered even more panic among refugees, as they had again and again to start fleeing, only to be told that no tsunami was imminent. It was, however, not the first quake that brought widespread destruction. They were the aftershocks that brought down cracked buildings already damaged by the first quake.

Strangely enough, the following day, on Thursday, 13 September, another earthquake registering 6.4 SR occurred far removed from Sumatra, namely in the north of Manado, North Sulawesi. As to this one, however, inhabitants in Manado were not even aware that an earthquake had happened. Concerned Jakartans calling relatives in Manado whether anyone was hurt, received the reply: "What quake?" Can the quake in far away Sulawesi be related to the Sumatra quake?

After five exhausting days living in tents through heat and rain, families in Bengkulu and Padang finally dared to enter their homes as tremors have subsided. The areas most devastated were found to be in the northern Bengkulu district of Muko-Muko , in the West Sumatra capital of Padang and the off-shore islands of Mentawai and Enggano. The series of quakes had apparently killed 23 people in the two provinces, injuring 88, and destroyed many homes and buildings, which, considering the magnitude of the quake is relatively small, since at the time of the quake most people were still awake. Now, however, the threat is that of health as children and elderly are falling sick with flu or even malaria.

The main hospital in Bengkulu had been badly damaged and patients must now receive treatment under tents. In Padang the St. Carolus primary and secondary school was seriously damaged, halting classes.

Although evacuation in Bengkulu and Padang were undertaken rapidly and safely, however, distribution of food, tents and medical supplies have not been as efficient. This is also since the areas affected to be distributed to are vast and widespread, while distribution to the offshore islands of Mentawai and Enggano lack the necessary infrastructure, so that supplies must, therefore, be dropped by helicopters.

On an inspection visit to Bengkulu and Padang on Monday, President Yudhoyono rapped Governors and regional leaders for their apathy in this critical situation, especially since aid supply from Jakarta were piling up in local storerooms, and many refugees remained in dire condition, while the distribution of food and aid – which is the responsibility of the local government - was slow.

Meanwhile, a number of volcanoes here, such as the Talang and the Dempo on Sumatra, and even the Merapi in Central Java and the Kelud in East Java are showing increased activity. Whether these volcanic activities are related to the Bengkulu quakes, scientists believe that this may very likely be, but do not as yet dare to ascertain so.

Geologists say that the Bengkulu quakes were caused by a subduction of the Indo-Australia Ocean plate that is pushing under the Eurasia plate. Kompas daily further explained that the first quake's epicenter by the town of Bengkulu was located on the southern outskirts of what is known as the Mentawai Seismic Gap in the Indian Ocean which runs northwest parallel to the coast of the island of Sumatra, while the following quakes centered more northerly within the Mentawai Seismic Gap itself.

The question that still remains for scientists to ponder is why is it that after the huge Bengkulu quake on 12 September that registered 7.9 on the Richter Scale, a second large quake occurred the following day on 13 September due north by Jambi at 06.49 hrs near the Mentawai islands, and registering 7.7 RS? This last quake can not be considered as an aftershock as it is indeed a second quake separate from the one the day earlier.

Danny Hilman, Head of the Research Team studying quakes and tsunamis along Sumatra, points out that the latter quakes are accumulated around the epicenter of the 1833 huge Mentawai quake that registered 8.9 on the Richter Scale. Studies of coral reefs along the coast of West Sumatra have shown that a quake at Padang on 10 February 1797 had killed 300 persons, even before the quake of 9.0SR on 29 January of 1833. Considering that there is usually a lapse of seismic activity of around 200 years between quakes, seismologists are concerned that the Mentawai Seismic Gap is today due for another huge quake.

Hilman also said that the huge August quake in Peru at 8 SR had destabilized all major plates around the world.

Nevertheless, scientists underline that until today, earthquakes can not be accurately predicted since *no* technology as yet exists that can predict imminent earthquakes. Scientists can only measure the strength and location of earthquakes *after* they occur and monitor whether the quake will cause a tsunami. This must be done in the shortest possible time after they occur, which today with technological advance in hardware and software, Indonesia is able to do within a short five minutes. Shortening the time of announcements after quakes occur is most important so as to allow more people to escape catastrophe the sooner they are informed. Tsunamis usually occur as a result of quakes registering more than 6.5 on the Richter Scale, with its epicenter located at an ocean depth of less than 60 km.

The last major quake that caused a huge tsunami in the Indian Ocean that completely devastated large tracts of the northern Sumatra province of Aceh, occurred on Christmas Boxing Day on 26 December 2004.

(Source: Kompas, SCTV, ANTV)

NEWS AND BACKGROUND:

1. Tourism and Transportation:

- **Tourism must Mitigate and Adapt to Climate Change: Lipman**

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has set “Climate Change” high on its agenda. On 1-3 October the 2nd International Conference on Climate Change and Tourism will be held in Davos, Switzerland. For this purpose, UNWTO is asking all participants to register with carbon offsetting organizations.

Carbon offsetting mitigates greenhouse gas emissions, states UNWTO press release, and can involve renewable energy projects such as solar, wind power and hydroelectricity or biomass and biofuels, and tree planting, among others.

The goal is to make all travel, accommodation and activity related to the Conference carbon neutral. Thanks to the support of its sponsors, UNWTO is not charging a registration fee for the 2nd International Conference on Climate Change and Tourism. (see webpage climate.UNWTO.org for more information.)

“We want to send a signal to our own industry that carbon offsetting is easy and that it will make a real difference over time, along with adaptation, mitigation and new technology. We also want to encourage a trend in the sector that carbon offset schemes will be used eventually by all meetings and events. Responding to the climate challenge will require substantial structural changes and take many years to implement, but there are some things we can do immediately,” said UNWTO Assistant Secretary-General, Geoffrey Lipman.

UNWTO’s commitment to sustainable development and the fight against poverty plays a crucial role when considering the wider implications of climate change. As the lead tourism organization in the UN family, the Organization wants to ensure that this important global sector plays an active and responsible part in this global challenge.

The 2nd International Conference on Climate Change and Tourism (Davos, Switzerland, 1-3 October) and the following Ministerial Summit in London (13 November), will help formulate UNWTO’s input to the UN’s Secretary General’s strategy for the upcoming negotiations under the UN Climate Change Convention in December in Bali, Indonesia.

Meanwhile UNWTO informs that it has created an information gathering web resource – displaying data, studies, policy papers, videos and other materials – as part of its effort to combat climate change.

"This service is a contribution to foster the knowledge base and the search for solutions to face the climate challenge," said the agency's Assistant Secretary-General Geoffrey Lipman of the "Climate and Tourism Information Exchange Service. "We have to

facilitate information exchange and help build networks which will constitute the true basis for concrete action."

UNWTO has spearheaded the study of linkages between climate and tourism, having convened the first-ever International Conference on Climate Change and Tourism in Tunisia in 2003.

"The tourism sector has to mitigate and adapt in the face of global warming and explore and put in place more climate-friendly and climate-proof alternatives," Mr. Lipman noted.

Climate change will also be a key topic of discussion at the UNWTO General Assembly in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, in late November, where the agency will formulate suggestions for Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's strategy for the upcoming Conference in Bali, Indonesia, to be held from 4-13 December.

That conference will seek to determine future action on mitigation, adaptation, the global carbon market and financing responses to climate change for the period after the expiry of the Kyoto Protocol – the current global framework for reducing greenhouse gas emissions – beyond 2012.

- **Bali's economy precarious if dependent on Tourism alone**

The Bali Post reports that Bali's economist, Prof. Nyoman Erawan has predicted recently that Bali's economic growth may reach 6% in 2007. The island's economy is gradually improving post economic crisis. However, such growth is precarious when it remains dominated by the tourism sector only, said Nyoman Erawan.

Bali must develop other sectors, such as agriculture, which can give significant contribution to public welfare.

Erawan further predicts that Bali's economy will continue to grow above 6% in 2008 as long as the province's economic stability is guarded and other sectors beyond tourism are developed.

Director of Bank Indonesia in Denpasar, Bali, Ketut Sanjaya agrees with this assessment. Compared to neighbouring provinces, Bali reached a 5.27% economic growth while West Nustenggara grew by 1.65%, East Nusatenggara by 4.96% and East Java by 5.5%.

Sanjaya is confident that Bali's economy will continue to improve this year, but will still be dominated by the trade, hotel and restaurants, transportation and communications sectors.

The Bali banking sector has also improved at Rp 24 trillion in assets until June 2007, up from Rp. 15.63 trillion same time last year. However, growth remains dominated by consumption (at 42%) compared to investments which reached 4% only, stated the Bank Indonesia official.

3. The Economy, Trade and Industry:

- **ASEAN blueprint agreed to transform region into a boom zone by 2015**

AP reports from Manila, the Philippines, that ASEAN economic ministers have approved a blueprint that should transform this region into a booming free trade zone by 2015, but warned that it is not a magic wand that can turn this bloc into "a Cinderella story."

While foreign investments flowed to a record high last year and the region has begun its march to freer trade, Southeast Asia still grapples with poverty, pockets of protectionism and daunting competition from economic powerhouses China and India.

The 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations' blueprint aims to turn the sprawling region with 500 million people, roughly European Union's market size, into an ASEAN economic community where goods, production assets, people and capital can move across borders freely.

Acknowledging the difficulty of breaking down age-old protectionist walls, ASEAN Secretary-General Ong Keng Yong said some members have yet to comply with pledges to slash tariffs for products under 11 categories this year.

"We have not sufficiently, satisfactorily complied yet," Ong told a news conference. The deadline would not be extended, he said without identifying who hasn't complied.

Aside from the blueprint, which is expected to be finally approved by ASEAN's heads of state in a November summit in Singapore, the region's trade negotiators have been busy negotiating a flurry of free-trade deals with countries like China, Japan, South Korea and India.

Ong reported progress in the bloc's talks with Japan and South Korea to create separate free-trade areas but said negotiations with India has run into a snag over the type of products, timeframe and levels of tariff reduction under a proposed deal.

ASEAN ministers decided they would accept new free-trade talks only when the workload of their negotiators allow it, Ong said, suggesting future negotiations would be deferred while the region tackles talks with six countries, including an upcoming session with the European Union.

Efforts by the region, once a bastion of protectionism, to negotiate such deals and break down trade barriers, have helped lure foreign investments, which hit a record-high of US\$52.4 billion last year, Ong said. But he added there was so much work to do.

While ASEAN has forged many free-trade deals, their enforcement has been "very slow and patchy," Ong told The Associated Press in an interview. "We want to clear up this unsatisfactory state," Ong said.

ASEAN's more affluent members - Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand - have pledged to slash tariffs for most goods and services by 2010, with the rest, comprising of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam, following by 2015, reports AP.

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