

All Malaysians safe

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At least 11 Indians found alive by rescue teams

**From Ashraf Abdullah
in New Delhi**

ALL 27 Malaysians who live in Gujarat are safe, as the death toll in the earthquake is expected to cross 20,000.

Malaysian High Commissioner to India Datuk Choo Siew Kioh said yesterday, 11 of the Malaysians had been contacted and they were not involved in the quake which rocked Bhuj, Bhachau, Rapar, Anjar, Morbi-Maliya and parts of Patan, Banaskantha and Mehsana districts in Gujarat.

He said the Malaysians who had been contacted also believed that other Malaysians were not involved in Friday's earthquake which measured 7.9 on the Richter Scale, making it one of India's worst ever natural disasters.

About 15 fresh tremors were recorded by the State Meteorological Department yesterday alone bringing the total number to 77 since Friday.

Choo said the 27 Malaysians living in Gujarat had registered with the High Commission, but was unable to say whether there were other Malaysians living there but had not registered.

"There are some Malaysian students in the Islamic colleges in Gujarat.

"We are still in close contact with authorities in Gujarat to establish whether Malaysians are involved in the disaster," he said when met at the High Commission.

Choo said there were not many Malaysians living in Gujarat compared to other places like Tamil Nadu or New Delhi.

Meanwhile, a Royal Malaysian Air Force aircraft carrying the 24-member Special Malaysian Disaster Assistance and Rescue Team (SMART) arrived today.

It will join rescue teams from Britain, Turkey, Germany, Russia and Switzerland already in Gujarat for the search and rescue mission.

Thousands of bodies are still believed to be trapped beneath the debris.

With foreign teams assisting in rescue operations, at least 11 people were extricated alive from collapsed structures yesterday, over 48 hours after the quake.

More than 400 doctors have arrived in Bhuj, the worst affected district.

Choo also said Malaysia had pledged US\$100,000 (RM380,000) in aid to the quake victims.

"We need to extend whatever assistance possible because Malaysia and India enjoy close relations in all areas," he said.

Choo suggested that private companies and individuals initiate a campaign to collect donations for the victims.

"As a gesture of goodwill, this donation can be handed over to the Prime Minister of India (Atal Behari Vajpayee) when he visits Malaysia next week," he said.

Vajpayee is expected to arrive in Malaysia on Feb 7, the first by an Indian PM since 1995.