

The need to heed warnings and to stay safe
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APRIL 11 was a historic day of sorts. Tuanku Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah, ascended the throne for the second time as the Yang di-Pertuan Agong in a ceremony steeped in tradition at the majestic new Istana Negara in Kuala Lumpur.

But April 11 is also a day which will be remembered for a 8.6-magnitude earthquake that rocked several nations around the Indian Ocean, particularly northern Sumatera.

A subsequent 8.2-magnitude aftershock occurred two hours later.

The quake triggered widespread tremors across Southern Asia and fears of a tsunami, with the Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre (PTWC) placing, among others, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore on its tsunami watch list.

In Malaysia, several parts along the west side of Peninsular Malaysia felt the two waves of tremors, which lasted several minutes.

The first thought to hit most people was that it cannot be tremors and surely it must be something else.

But soon, as the reality of the tremors started to sink in (with the television shaking it was not hard to notice), it was apparent that this quake was going to be huge.

The tremors certainly brought back memories of the devastating earthquake and tsunami that struck on Boxing Day in 2004.

The impact of which, was mostly felt in Aceh.

Over 200,000 people across the Indian Ocean nations lost their lives that fateful day, just after Christmas.

The harrowing visuals of sea water deluging Aceh is still on the minds of the people. And not forgetting the great Eastern Japan earthquake last year as well.

Back to the present. The earthquake sent a huge buzz across cyberspace, with social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook flooded with updates on the earthquake and subsequent developments.

And in the subsequent developments, it was reported that a tsunami was less likely to occur as the tectonic plates had moved horizontally and not vertically.

Prayers also began to pour out, for protection upon those in areas close to the epicentre of the earthquake, notably Northern Sumatera.

Over on the island, with the 2004 tsunami still fresh in mind, no chances were taken.

The public were advised to stay clear of the beaches, while those who stayed nearby moved away temporarily.

This was evident when places such as Batu Ferringhi and the popular Straits Quay mall were deserted.

It was rather unusual to see the outlets at Straits Quay shut down so early for the night, and even more unusual for there not to be anyone there at all.

But it was clear that the business owners and the security personnel there were not taking any chances.

And it was great to note that members of the public at Straits Quay and Batu Ferringhi heeded their advice and decided to call it an early night.

On the other hand, it was disheartening that in certain areas, such as at Gurney Drive, Esplanade and the clan jetties at Pengkalan Weld, members of the public were still seen nearby the seaside, despite warnings to steer clear of the seaside after the tremors.

Although no tsunami crashed on our shores, we still need to heed the warnings of the authorities.

It is not about, "Nah, a tsunami won't happen", but it is about putting safety first and not get caught up in capturing the moment.

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