

Tsunami systems upgraded

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PUTRAJAYA: The National Tsunami Early Warning System is being upgraded with additional equipment to detect changes in sea level, monitor coastal areas and issue alerts to the public.

The second phase, which will be completed next year, will see the installation of 15 tide gauges to detect the rise in sea levels, 14 coastal cameras and 10 warning sirens.

These are in addition to the six tide gauges, four coastal cameras and 13 sirens which were installed under the first phase completed last year.

The system also has two

deep-sea buoys for the early detection of tsunami.

Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Dr Maximus Ongkili said the first phase of the early warning system enabled the authorities to issue warnings to agencies dealing with disaster management, the public and the media within 15 minutes of receiving the data.

"We have come a long way since the aftermath of the Dec 26, 2004, tsunami," he said when launching the 5th session of the Intergovernmental Co-ordination Group for the Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System (ICG/IOTWS) yesterday.

The additional equipment

will let the system handle more than one hazard while monitoring weather and earthquake readings.

"We intend to use the early warning system for multiple purposes," Ongkili said.

The centre is located at the headquarters of the Malaysian Meteorological Department (MMD) and operates round the clock.

It started in 2005 following the Boxing Day tsunami by disseminating information on earthquakes and tsunami warnings in the Indian Pacific oceans and the South China Sea.

The three-day ICG/IOTWS meeting will hear reports from its various working groups and

plan ways to ensure there was skilled manpower to handle the technology used for early tsunami detection.

Members of the grouping comprise countries from Asia, Australasia, Africa and parts of the Middle East which have coastal areas bordering the Indian Ocean.

Meanwhile, MMD director-general Dr Yap Kok Seng said the earth tremors that had been occurring in Bukit Tinggi, Pahang, was not of major concern.

The area experienced 16 tremors from Nov 30 to March 15.

The tremors had magnitudes ranging between 1.8 and 3.5 on the Richter scale.

These are believed to have been caused by earthquakes in Sumatra.

"The tremors were minor incidents but the area is under constant surveillance," Yap said.

Ongkili said the MMD had conducted awareness programmes for residents in the area so that they would not be alarmed.

Bukit Tinggi sits on a fault line and the tremors are said to be part of the ground's adjustment to movements of the earth's plates caused by several smaller earthquakes which had been occurring since the 2004 quake which measured 9.3 on the Richter scale.



THE NATIONAL TSUNAMI EARLY WARNING SYSTEM

First phase (completed last year)

- 6 tide gauges to detect the rise in sea levels
- 4 coastal cameras
- 13 warning sirens

Second phase (completion next year)

- 15 tide gauges
- 14 coastal cameras
- 10 warning sirens