



Disaster brings worry about families in Asia

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When Fazal Davood heard Sunday that a powerful earthquake and monster tsunami had hit Southeast Asia, he feared for his mother, who still lives in Davood's native Sri Lanka.

"I've been worried sick," said Davood, who lives in Hampden Twp. with his wife, Nihara. "I couldn't reach her. But tonight, we heard that she got out, went to higher land and is safe. I'm so thankful."

Davood, a Highmark Blue Shield financial analyst, said he's been consumed by news of the disaster that has killed more than 22,000 and left hundreds of thousands homeless. His mother, Jumarith Davood, lives 200 yards from the beach in a ranch house in Mount Levinia, seven miles south of Colombo.

"I grew up in that house along the coastline," he said. "The Indian Ocean is usually calm and very beautiful, especially at sunrise and sunset. I've gone for lots of boat rides in that ocean."

Davood hasn't spoken to his mother, but last night he reached a lifelong friend who routinely checks on her.

"He said that the water came within 100 feet of our house, but it's OK," Davood said. "He also said that my mother had got out safely and went with relatives 10 miles away."

Davood said his friend heard the first wave of water around 9 a.m. Sunday.

"The water receded and people went to see what was going on," Davood said. "When the water came back again, my friend ran and got away. He said people standing too close were dragged in. Now, he says the whole country is like a funeral."

"His secretary, who is 22, and her father were washed away. My brother-in-law lost 51 distant relatives in southern Sri Lanka. It's very depressing."

Davood, who has lived in the United States for 20 years, said he hopes to talk to his mother, 62, in a day or so.

"My mother is a strong woman," he said. "I haven't visited Sri Lanka for six years, but I sure wish I could see my mom now."

In Madras, India, the college that Zarin Mohamed attended was underwater. Mohamed, a Hampden Twp. resident, spent most of Sunday on the phone with members of her family who live fairly close to the beach.

"It was very scary, because we didn't know what to expect," she said. Her family here was glued to TV Asia, a satellite channel that gave them the most details on what was happening in the

wake of the disaster.

Mohamed's family in India was not injured, but they witnessed terrifying scenes.

"There were many fishermen there that were just, in moments, swept away," said Mohamed's sister Samia Malik.

Kanitta Suksawaschon lives in Phuket, an island town in Thailand, but she was visiting her aunt in Harrisburg when the tsunami hit her home country. She contacted her family and found they were on ground high enough to avoid any damage.

"At first, we worried there might be flooding going to the town, and they might have had to move to the hills," Suksawaschon said.

The town's dam was closed to block ocean water from submerging the area. Suksawaschon returns to Thailand on Thursday.

Harrisburg Mayor Stephen R. Reed encouraged residents to help the relief effort by sending money to the American Red Cross or UNICEF.

"A disaster of this magnitude cries out for a truly worldwide response, especially ... occurring in the midst of this holiday season," Reed said in a statement yesterday.

The Rev. Benjamin Chinnappan has given \$3,000 to the relief effort in his native Tamil Nadu state of southern India. Friends there tell him of the devastation and shock in the aftermath of the disaster.

"People are not even in relief work yet, but survival," the priest said. "Things are completely in chaos, like after Sept. 11 here, or the Florida hurricanes."

Chinnappan moved to Chicago two months ago after more than six years as chaplain at Holy Spirit Hospital. In the midstate, he founded Dalit Solidarity, an organization to help the poor and "untouchables" of Indian society.

The Camp Hill-based organization built a residential school and a public clinic not far from Chinnappan's hometown of Pondichery. Both survived the tsunami, but Chinnappan's home was hit hard.

He is trying to donate money and other aid to the relief effort in Southeast Asia through Dalit Solidarity.

"I owe something to my people," he said. "God will give me back."

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