

Tsunamis alter course

Breakbulk carriers likely to aid in recovery efforts

The most recent developments and tragedy in Southeast Asia have eclipsed other ongoing projects in Mauritania, Libya and Afghanistan. This natural catastrophe has been a wakeup call for those involved in international logistics. It is clear that, because of the urgency at hand, most initial cargo, such as food, medicines and water-purification equipment will have to be flown in to affected areas. The sheer magnitude of the disaster is still being evaluated with at least eight countries on two continents hit by devastating floods. Some areas are well-poised to expand existing facilities and cope with the influx of increased cargo being landed.

Thailand, for one, appears to be well



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on the way to taking care of its problems. The situation is worse for Southeast India. Only Chennai has the sufficient capacity to handle both containers and breakbulk. Colombo, Sri Lanka, has only suffered minor damages, but the need for reconstruction on the island is huge; other ports in the west and north are either severely damaged or don't have sufficient capacity.

The biggest problem in many ways is Sumatra, especially in the extreme north where the epicenter of the earthquake caused horrendous tsunamis. All ports in the province of Aceh are almost destroyed. The closest deep-water Port of Belawan is some 300 miles distant. All asphalt roads as well as the single

railroad connections are severely damaged. In addition, rescue efforts are being hampered by refugees streaming south.

This is all posing severe restrictions not only on the humanitarian-aid providers, but also on those involved with rebuilding the infrastructure — a project that may take 10 to 20 years to complete. Construction materials will have to be landed by shallow-draft barges coming from distant points, such as Jakarta or Singapore.

The Maldives, with its average elevation of three feet, have miraculously survived. The main port of Male is fully operational and ready to accept shipments to replace its thriving tourist sector.

It is also curious to note that not a single oceangoing vessel has been lost in an area known for the busiest shipping lanes in the world. After the survivors are settled, the real task of reconstruction begins. Breakbulk carriers will play an important part in this effort, and the need for innovative logistics will be great. ■

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