

How Bangladesh Escaped December 2004 Tsunami Unscathed

In 1970, a powerful cyclone killed nearly half a million people along the southern coastline of Bangladesh. Some 138,000 people perished in yet another cyclone that mauled its coastline two decades later. Cyclones, and floods are so common in Bangladesh that people outside the country commonly identify it with this disastrous natural phenomenon.

Not during the recent quake-tsunami though. Bangladeshis must be thanking their lucky stars and may still be wondering how they came out the tsunami calamity relatively unscathed. While tens of thousands have died in neighbouring India, Sri Lanka and Thailand, only two Bangladeshi children drowned when their boat capsized in the high waves during tsunami.

Geologists attribute Bangladesh's good luck to a natural process of sedimentation, making the sea bed shallow along the coast. Billions of tons of sediment, which the country's numerous rivers carry into the sea, have created a natural barrier against the tsunami. Known as the continental shelf, the barrier helped slow down the sea surges before they hit the coast. The barrier has helped keep the sea floor shallow - the coast water in Bangladesh is up to 66 feet deep - and "absorbed the impact of the tsunami."