Cornell Feb 10 Seminar to Explore Sumatra Earthquake and Tsunami

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Cornell Feb. 10 seminar to explore Sumatra earthquake and tsunami

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ITHACA, N.Y. −− Cornell University will present a seminar, "The Sumatra Earthquake and Tsunami: The Science Behind the Headlines," Thursday, Feb. 10, from 4:30 to 6 p.m. in room B14 of Hollister Hall. It is being held by the School of Civil and Environmental Engineering and the Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences.

The public is invited to attend without charge.

Philip Liu, professor of civil engineering, and Muawia Barazangi and Dan Karig, professors of earth and atmospheric sciences, will make presentations.

Liu recently returned from a scientific fact−finding trip to Sri Lanka on the Dec. 26 Asian tsunami. Karig will provide a general overview of the geographical and geological setting of the region devastated by the tsunami.

Barazangi will explain how the tsunami−triggering earthquake occurred near Sumatra along a major convergent plate boundary, where the oceanic Indian plate is subducting beneath the continental Southeast Asia plate. He says that as much as 750 miles of the contact zone between these two tectonic plates ruptured during the earthquake, with an average slip of 49 to 66 feet. "The occurrence of such mega−thrust, great earthquakes [magnitude 9] is infrequent, approximately once every 200 years," Barazangi says.

"It appears that no such great earthquake occurred in the recent past along the northern continuation of this plate boundary from the Andaman Islands to Assam in northeast India. This is a matter of utmost concern for the future, considering that Bangladesh is located very near this segment of the plate boundary, and that most of this nation, with a population of over 130 million, lies very close to sea level," Barazangi says.

He also will examine the tsunami threat to the eastern Mediterranean. Compounding this problem is a lack of warning system in the region, he says.

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