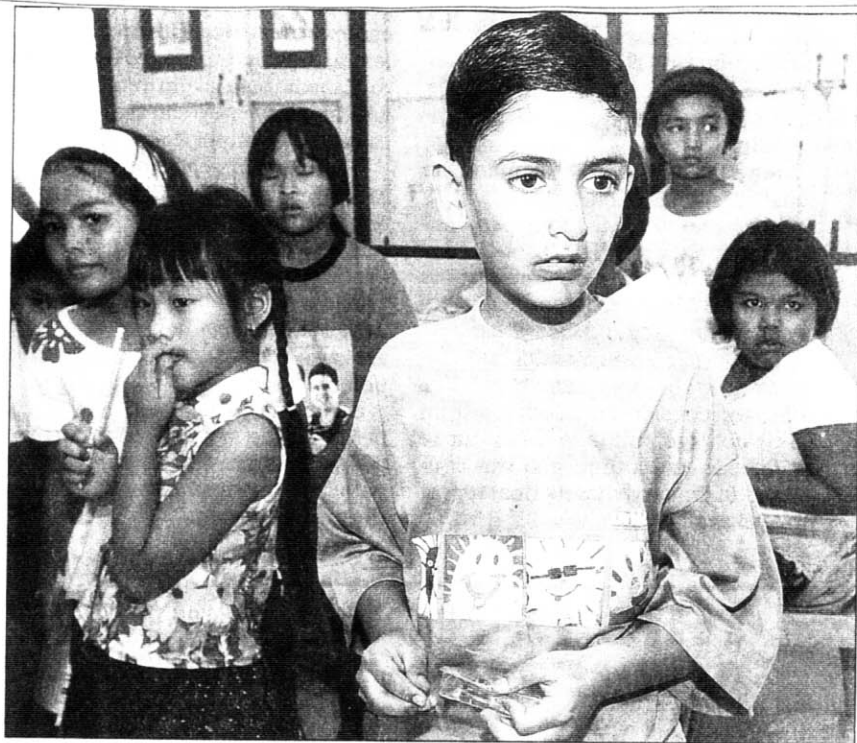


TOP NEWS



Apichart Weerawong, Associated Press
Bilaal Rajan, 8, of Toronto, visits children in Phuket, Thailand, who were affected by the tsunami which hit Dec. 26, 2004.

Boy raises \$2.5M for tsunami relief

ALISA TANG
 THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
 PATONG BEACH, THAILAND

Most eight-year-olds visiting Thailand are probably keen to focus on playtime. But Bilaal Rajan, a Toronto boy who has raised millions of dollars for tsunami relief, was busy attending to his duties Sunday as a child spokesman for the United Nations' children's agency.

The day after the Dec. 26 disaster, Bilaal launched UNICEF's Canada Kids Earthquake Challenge, talking at schools and encouraging every child in Canada to raise \$100 for UNICEF's work to help children in the affected areas. His efforts brought in \$2.5 million.

"You have not lived until you have done something for which someone cannot repay you," said the boy.

Fundraising may seem an unusual activity for an eight-year-old, but Bilaal's father says his son has always been interested in helping others.

"Bilaal has always been very giving. It's in his nature," said Aman Rajan. "We've always fostered in him that there are people in the world who are needier than us, so when he sees need, he always says, 'Let's do something.'"

After the 2001 earthquake in India, Bilaal — then four — raised money by selling oranges door-to-door.

Bilaal is touring some of the countries — Thailand, the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Indonesia — devastated by the killer waves. At the Ban Kalim elementary school here, some of the children lost homes and relatives. But they didn't talk about it during Bilaal's visit. Instead, one boy asked Bilaal what snow is like. A girl asked how many countries Bilaal has helped.

They grew livelier when Bilaal brought out a toy for them.

"It brings joy to my eyes to see kids happy and playing," Bilaal said. "Why should children in other parts of the world not have what children in Canada have?"