

SHOCK AND FURY

The world can only watch as Japan tragedy unfolds



DEVASTATION: Waves from the 8.9 quake engulf coastal homes. No tsunami has ever been documented to this degree, scientists say.

Kyodo News

Years of drills are no match for 8.9

KENJI HALL
REPORTING FROM TOKYO
MITCHELL LANDSBERG
REPORTING FROM LOS ANGELES

Earthquakes dwell deep in the Japanese imagination. No country may be better prepared for a major earthquake than Japan. Seismic standards for construction are among the strictest in

the world. From a young age, Japanese learn to dive under desks to protect themselves in a quake. The nation has a state-of-the-art tsunami warning system.

That preparation undoubtedly saved many lives Friday, when a magnitude 8.9 earthquake struck off Japan's main island, shaking buildings in a large swath of the country and sending a 30-foot tsunami onto a populated stretch of coast.

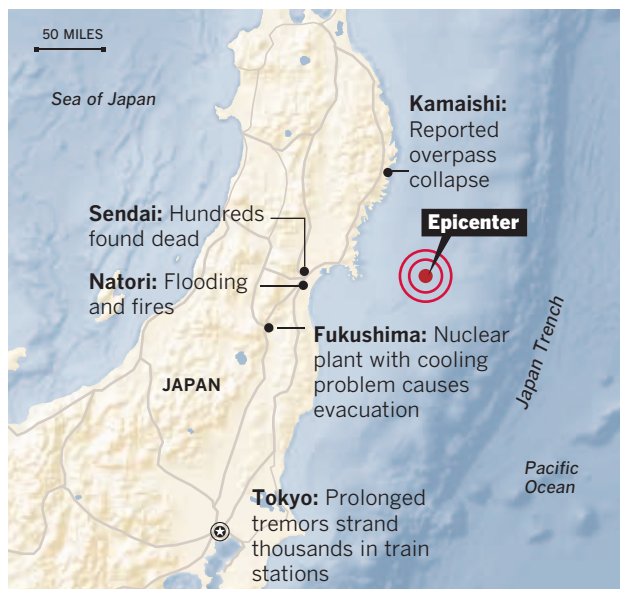
But an uncomfortable truth may emerge from this quake, which killed hundreds of people and caused damage that could mount into the hundreds of billions of dollars. The lesson is that there's only so much that disaster preparedness can do. At some point, humans — even those in an affluent society with 21st century technology and peerless infrastructure — respond to deeper need to panic or flee.

The scenes from Japan captured the almost incomprehensible power of one of the strongest earthquakes ever recorded. The tsunami swept away houses, cars and

[See Prepared, A8]

Deadly waves

Japan's 8.9 earthquake set off a chain of death and destruction. Tsunami-caused flooding, power failures, fires and transportation cancellations spread down the east coast of Honshu island. Some examples:



Sources: Reuters, Associated Press, Times reporting
Graphics reporting by TOM REINKEN

LORENA INIGUEZ ELEBEE Los Angeles Times

EXPANDED COVERAGE IN LATEXTRA

A powerhouse, upside down

Japan's most punishing earthquake on record plunges the nation into an apocalyptic scene.

latimes.com The latest news is available online

Event has reach to the West Coast

The tsunami crashes into California and the Pacific Northwest with six to eight-foot surges.

A wired planet sees the horror as it happens

Instead of bearing witness to a disaster's aftermath, viewers wait, and watch, in wrenching real time.

SCOTT GOLD
AND HECTOR BECERRA

After the quake, it took 45 minutes for the tsunami to reach the coast of Japan — 45 minutes of knowing, of waiting, of bracing.

When it came, they were all glued to their televisions — a Jesuit priest in New York, an engineering professor in rural Oregon, a geophysicist in San Diego. What unfolded had never been broadcast live before: a 13-foot wall of mud that belittled human achievement, folding houses inside out, propelling yachts across miles of rice fields, rupturing oil refineries, sweeping

trains from their tracks and killing hundreds.

By now, we're versed in bearing witness to the aftermath of disaster: limbs jutting out from collapsed buildings in Haiti, survivors using laundry to spell out "HELP US" on their rooftops after Hurricane Katrina.

This was different — a disaster unfolding in visceral, wrenching real time, for viewers who were alternately spellbound and tortured by their inability to do anything about it.

Japan's plight came on a sunny Friday afternoon; the magnitude 8.9 earthquake, the largest to strike the area in more than a millennium, hit at 2:46 p.m. local time. Japan is not only an advanced economy but one of the most wired nations on earth; at one point Friday, there were 20 tweets a second coming out of Tokyo.

The nation, meanwhile, is [See Images, A9]

Refineries' shutdown may boost oil prices

RONALD D. WHITE
REPORTING FROM LOS ANGELES
DON LEE
REPORTING FROM WASHINGTON

The powerful earthquake and tsunami that slammed northern Japan knocked out car plants and steel mills, stranded thousands in offices and at Disney's resort in Tokyo, and pummeled financial markets in Asia and Europe. But the biggest effect on the world economy may yet come in further roiling oil prices that already have cast a pall on the global recovery.

That's because the 8.9-magnitude temblor forced the shutdown of a number of Japan's oil refining facilities as well as some of its nuclear power plants. The loss of substantial refining capacity in the world's third-largest economy is likely to inject more volatility into gasoline prices — raising the risk of even higher pump prices for American motorists.

Industry experts say that if Japan can't get its refineries back on line quickly, there will be a spike in that country's demand for gaso-

[See Oil, A10]

Another part of old Las Vegas vanishes

The 59-year-old Sahara hotel-casino will close in May.

ASHLEY POWERS
REPORTING FROM LAS VEGAS
JESSICA GELT
REPORTING FROM LOS ANGELES

The Sahara was once an exotic desert locale where Frank Sinatra could enjoy a cocktail and bathing beauties were paid to frolic in the Garden of Allah pool. In recent years, the hotel-casino has sunk to touting \$1 blackjack and a NASCAR Cafe

known for its 6-pound burrito.

Now the 59-year-old icon of the Las Vegas Strip is shutting its doors, yet another victim of a deep recession that has squelched the city's tourism for more than three years.

In southern Nevada, casinos are frequently bought, sold, remodeled or imploded to make way for new resorts — but rarely shuttered.

The announcement will darken roughly 1,700 hotel rooms, thinning competition in a town of 150,000 rooms — widely considered too many. But it also deals a psychological blow to Las

[See Sahara, A16]

Obama vows to squeeze Kadafi out

The president makes clear that economic and diplomatic pressure, not military action, is his preferred method. **WORLD, A3**

Nation **A14**
California **AA3**
Weather **AA8**

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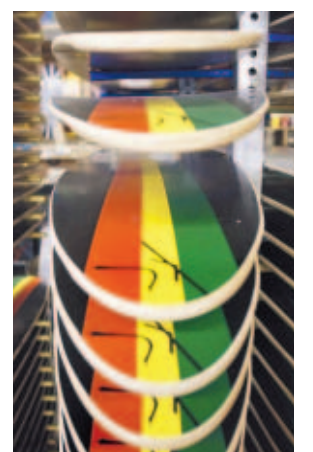
Daylight saving time begins Sunday. Move clocks ahead one hour.



BACKSEAT BARRISTER

Matthew McConaughey is on the move in 'Lincoln Lawyer'

CALENDAR



MADE IN CALIFORNIA

Rolling out skateboards in San Diego

BUSINESS