

'Leave or die'

A devastated Japanese town fights back

HIGASHIMATSUSHIMA, Japan: FOR RESIDENTS of Higashimatsushima in Japan, there was no question of whether to leave their homes in areas that were vulnerable to natural disasters.

Given the relative speed and unpredictability of an earthquake or tsunami, it was even more crucial to have a clear plan to get out and get out fast.

The town's mayor Iwao Atsumi said residents were simply presented with the position: 'if you want to live, you leave, if you want to die, you stay'. There is no room for negotiation.

"When the tsunami hits, the people have no option but to run away (to higher ground)," said Atsumi.

By the time the March 2011 tsunami hit, of the town's 43,132 residents, more than 15,000 considered in need of evacuation had already headed to 106 shelters in safe areas.

STRICT INSTRUCTIONS

He said that the plan included strict instructions which were given to the residents and reinforced in drill by a team of community volunteers.

Municipal leaders cannot force a person to disclose his personal situation under Japan privacy laws, but Higashimatsushima insists that persons who need assistance indicate this so that they may be helped into a shelter.

With 65 per cent of the town inundated and approximately 73 per cent of all housing destroyed in some way, there was really no choice or place to stay.

The city recorded 1,109 dead and 24 missing. At 1,133, the figure represented three per cent of the city's population.

Tough decisions had to be made even though some residents, local fisherfolk in the area famous for conch and seaweed harvesting, had concerns about leaving their houses permanently.

"What we did was to designate the coastal area band as a restricted area and banned it as a residential area. The city has made it into its law and regulation, prohibiting people to live in this area," the mayor outlined.

But there have been concessions.

"There is a special land where people live, but they had to move away from the island but continued with their fishing. Also, the local government provided funding to relocate residents with land provided for

building homes under an arrangement where (for) the first 30 years the land is provided to the people rent free," said Atsumi.

For persons who could afford to build their own house, for example, seniors, they are provided with housing at a special rate of roughly JMD\$11,169 (10,000 yen) per month.

A new elementary school in the relocation area opened its doors in January 2016, while 1,001 residential apartment houses have already been completed and delivered.

Atsumi said that while they could not have imagined the scope of the earthquake and tsunami, they had learnt from previous disasters, especially a massive 1995 earthquake, which devastated parts of the city of Kobe.

"Once in every 35 to 40 years we expect something, so we are prepared for that, but this disaster was a one in 600-800 year event, so we were not prepared against the enormity of it," said Atsumi.

THE TOWN PLAN

Pulling on that experience, the town crafted its own plan; large sorting areas – roughly the size of two football fields – were identified, with a designated dumping site where debris was sorted mostly by hand to help displaced workers earn.

A special 20-foot seawall has been constructed, and is specially designed to absorb a tsunami on its way into the town for the first time, and also as water recedes, which tends to happen in such circumstances.

A second wall was built about 1.5 kilometres further inland, with special diversion canals to feed the water back out to sea.

The city also installed seven solar-powered surveillance cameras along the seaside, which allows meteorologists to see incoming tsunamis and guide residents to even higher ground, based on the water phenomenon.

To power itself, a solar farm with 15,000 panels has been built, and provides power for 600 families, while producing 2.1 million kilowatt-hours per year.

But just as the city has learnt from the 1995 earthquake, the aim is to cover all the bases and make a model city in disaster recovery so that they may be able to help other areas.

It is a team effort which, so far, has pulled on other communities and the support of local residents in a game of survival.

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PHOTOS BY AMITABH SHARMA

Japan Meteorological Agency headquarters in Tokyo is the heart and soul of the country's weather system and disaster management.

Preparing for THE INEVITABLE

With 200,000 earthquakes each year, Japan has lessons for Jamaica

Glenda Anderson
Sunday Gleaner Writer

TOKYO, Japan:

TOKYO WEATHER forecasters have predicted a 70 per cent chance of a major earthquake hitting the country in the next 30 years.

This is news which has bolstered a sustained public campaign on what to do should the earthquake happen soon.

Japan, a series of islands in the Pacific Ocean, sits on a major fault line which sees the country particularly vulnerable to quakes and shocks.

Locals can still recall the three major earthquakes that have struck in recent times – 1995, 2011, and 2016, all magnitude scale seven, the largest recognised in Japan.

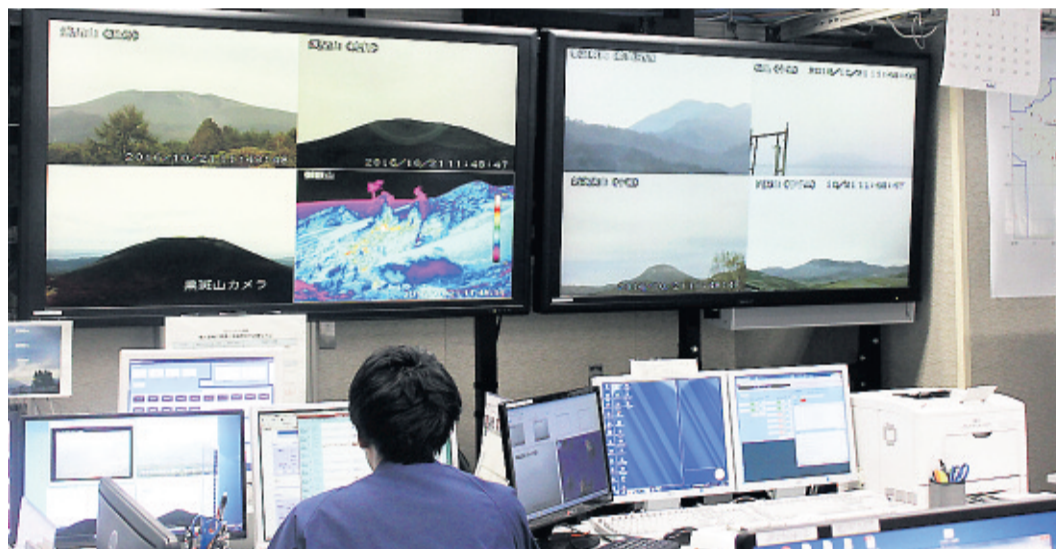
In 2011, the earthquake happened on the ocean floor, moving tectonic plates over a vast area. In 1995 and 2016, however, it was the result of an active fault which saw damage concentrated over a small area.

Takashi Nakajima, instructor at the Honjo Bosai-kan (Life Safety Learning Centre) operated by the Tokyo Fire Department, says that 20 per cent of magnitude six earthquakes that happen in the world happen in Japan, prompting the country's no-nonsense approach to disaster preparedness.

SIMULATION EXERCISE

Still, there have been massive destruction and heavy casualties. A simulation exercise and information session on Friday, October 20, for journalists on the 2017 Pacific-Caribbean Journalists' Programme at the life train centre in Tokyo, highlighted renewed focus on the role of the youth in creating awareness and sustaining efforts in preparing for disasters.

Schools and community groups rallied to create awareness and exit plans with volunteer teams often staffed by high-school students.



A section at Japan Meteorological Agency headquarters in Tokyo that monitors real-time volcanic activity across the country.

“ Schools and community groups rally to create awareness and exit plans with volunteer teams often staffed by high-school students. ”

Regular community drills and updates are also conducted.

A series of measures were pitched at the individual level, and though this was not mandated by local authorities, persons were encouraged to fortify their own homes with simple adjustments.

For example, persons can use braces and straps to secure large furniture to the wall, install special locks on furniture doors so that contents would not be tossed out, and placing rubber mats under furniture.

Nakajima said that in the 1995 earthquake, of the 6,434 persons who were killed, 5,000 of that number were crushed by falling furniture.

With 200,000 earthquakes annually in the country, it is not

just seconds to respond to earthquake alerts.

HELP OF SENSORS

"Whenever an earthquake is sensed by humans, the system will make a command. Sensors are placed at 300 places across the islands with earthquake montage machines at 4,000 locations," he said.

Using the data, analysts determine the size and place of the earthquake. It takes two minutes to make a decision and within no more than two minutes to disseminate information to the television – crucial timing to get out of the way of a disaster you really cannot see coming.

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A school under construction in the new city of Higashimatsushima.

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IMPORTANT NOTICE

The Trustees of the Pension Plan would like to advise the following Deferred Members of their intentions to windup the above captioned Pension Plan.

- ARMSTRONG, BEVERLY
- GREEN, PATRICIA
- THOMAS, WINSOME

Contact us @: 902-3475 for further details.

COURT MANAGEMENT SERVICES

PUBLIC NOTICE

The Special Coroner's Court is seeking the public's assistance in locating the following witnesses:

NAME	LAST KNOWN ADDRESS
Keino Carter	C/o Lot 3213 Adar Drive, Waterford, St. Catherine
Cons. Kurt Bennett	C/o Spanish Town Police Station
Cons. Dwight Bissick	C/o Port Antonio Police Station
Det/ Cpl. Cheddi Miller	C/o Scene of Court
Cons. Damion Lewin	C/o Area 2 Headquarters
Cons. Walter Skeen	C/o Lot 464 Rayon Terr. Elton Spanish Town St. Catherine
Bevolyn Jabang	C/o Above Rocks
Det/Sgt. Lauren Campbell	C/o 42 Torino Drive, Angels Estate, St. Catherine
George Campbell	C/o Hayles Field Race Course, Clarendon
Damion Davis	C/o 1 Addington Ave, Kingston 8
Patrick Hines	C/o 1 Addington Ave, Kingston 8
Kevin Stephenson	C/o 1 Addington Ave, Kingston 8
Sgt. Hugh Morgan	C/o Spanish Town Police Station

Will these persons or anyone knowing their whereabouts please contact Tel: 578-1085.