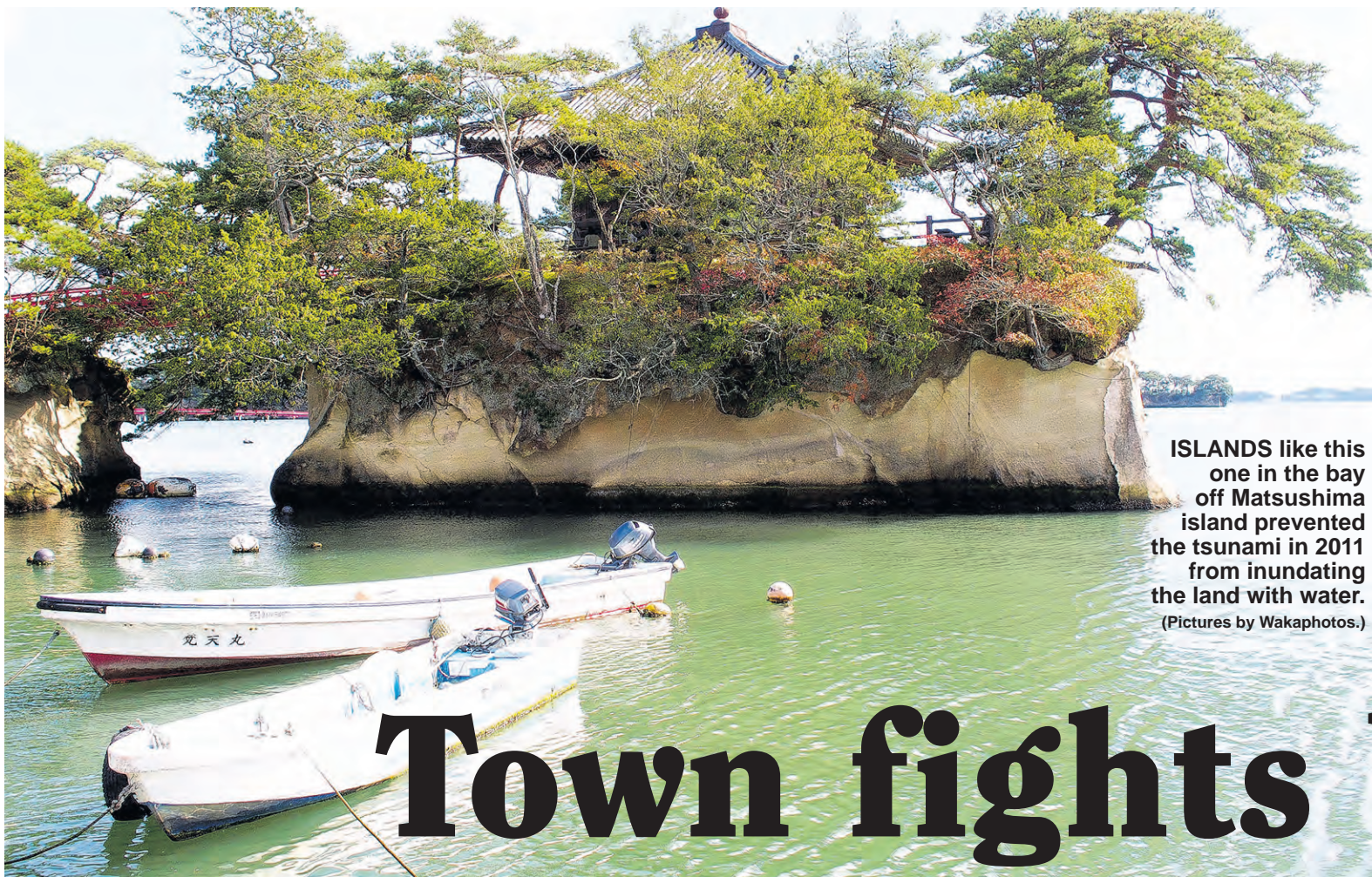


**FOCUS**



**ISLANDS** like this one in the bay off Matsushima island prevented the tsunami in 2011 from inundating the land with water. (Pictures by Wakaphotos.)

**DISASTER MITIGATION WORKSHOP**

The Association for Promotion of International Cooperation (APIC) and the Foreign Press Centre of Japan have come together once again to give regional journalists insight into how the country goes about mitigating the effects of natural disasters.

Japan, a country known in recent times for earthquakes and tsunamis, has spent hundreds of millions of dollars on special technology and building methods to protect its citizenry.

This year, APIC has invited six journalists from the Caribbean and Pacific region to get a first-hand look at those methods. Associate Editor Barry Alleyne is representing **THE NATION**.

# Town fights back

by **BARRY ALLEYNE** in Higashimatsushima, Japan

**THE HAMLET** of Higashimatsushima could probably be the world's most safe island township.

Wrecked by two massive earthquakes and an equally destructive tsunami in the space of 14 years, way above

the planet's susceptibility average, the town of 43 000 inhabitants now has in place a series of protective measures in an effort to avoid another "town-lashing", so to speak.

In 2003, scores of houses and important buildings were damaged during an earthquake, but for residents

of the seafood and tourist town, nothing can compare to the Great East Japan quake which struck at 2:46 p.m. on March 11, 2011, and the resulting tsunami that brought 40 waves to take 1 300 lives, destroy

■ Continued on next page.

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**FOCUS**

# Systems shield after tragedies

■ From Page 14.

houses, hospitals and train stations, changing their lives forever.

The memories remain, but Higashimatsushima has made sure there will be no repeat.

In a unique combination of support from national government and an extremely reliable community emergency management system, the city has been able to protect itself like no other eastern village in the country.

Firstly, government banned residential housing in the city's coastal areas, proving residents first with temporary housing, then building a new village with taxpayers' money further inland.

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 constructed seven solar-powered surveillance cameras along the seaside which allow meteorologists to see incoming tsunamis and guide residents to even higher ground, based on the water phenomenon.

The tragedy in 2011 had also transformed Higashimatsushima into one of Japan's strongest communities, especially when it comes to disaster management.

Special committees meet continuously, and about three disaster emergency drills for all residents are held annually.

## Community spirit

After the tsunami, Japan's central government provided 95 per cent of the finance needed to rebuild the town, but way more had to be done before that was possible.

And it was all left up to the community. More than 1 000 townsfolk, without a job, home or way to make money, immediately volunteered to help clear the thousands of tonnes of debris left behind by both earthquake and tsunami.

Mayor of the city, Iwao Atsumi, couldn't be prouder of the work done and the community spirit which inspired it.

"We knew we could not have had the resources as a small town to do it all ourselves, especially after such a large tragedy, but the residents were very collaborative. They loved their community, and though they were traumatised for a few days, they eventually regained their emotions and helped build back their city," a blushing Atsumi told a group of reporters who came to the town for special viewing of the new initiatives, in addition to a number of historic sites related to the earthquake, which was the fourth largest ever recorded.

"It was the residents playing an assertive role which allowed the reconstruction to move at a good pace," the mayor said.

Though it started out as volunteer work, every resident in Higashimatsushima was eventually paid for the painstaking work, which involved separating all debris and preparing it for recycling.

To purchase an incinerator from a private company would have cost the municipality 7 billion yen (BDS\$125 million), but instead decided to spend that money paying its own citizens.

"That allowed the people to make money for themselves which restarted business, and saved the economy," Atsumi asserted.

To handle the hundreds of thousands of tonnes of debris, three baseball-sized collection yards were created at different points in the city.



**MAYOR IWAO ATSUMI** wants his city to be the safest in eastern Japan.



**HIGASHIMATSUSHIMA** mayor Iwao Atsumi showing where in his city a large field was created for the purpose of collecting recyclable material.

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