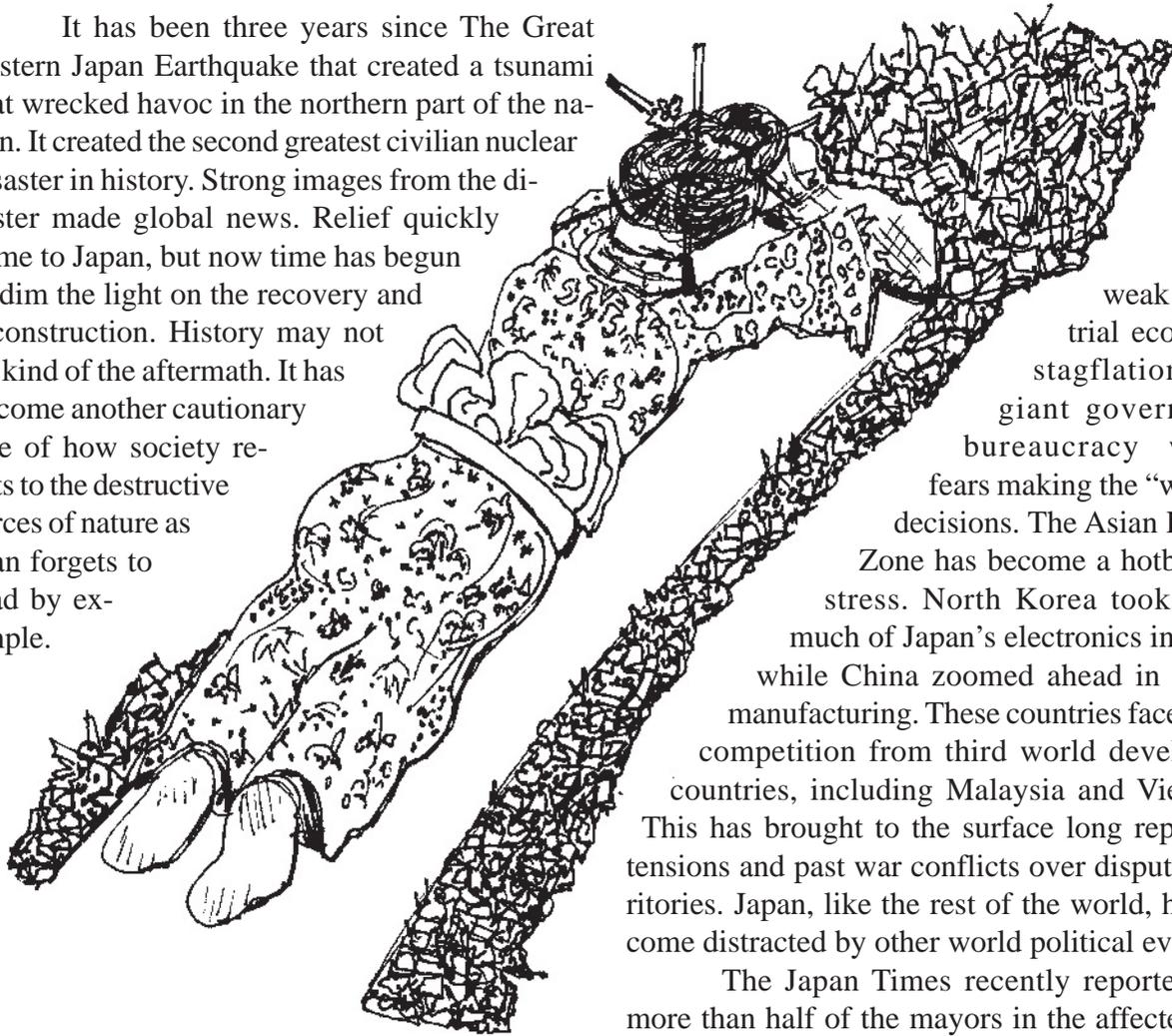


THE REAL NEWS MARCH 2014 EDITION

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It has been three years since The Great Eastern Japan Earthquake that created a tsunami that wrecked havoc in the northern part of the nation. It created the second greatest civilian nuclear disaster in history. Strong images from the disaster made global news. Relief quickly came to Japan, but now time has begun to dim the light on the recovery and reconstruction. History may not be kind of the aftermath. It has become another cautionary tale of how society reacts to the destructive forces of nature as man forgets to lead by example.



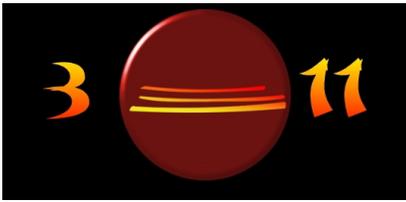
weak industrial economy, stagflation, and giant government bureaucracy which fears making the “wrong” decisions. The Asian Pacific Zone has become a hotbed for stress. North Korea took away much of Japan’s electronics industry while China zoomed ahead in global manufacturing. These countries face harsh competition from third world developing countries, including Malaysia and Vietnam. This has brought to the surface long repressed tensions and past war conflicts over disputed territories. Japan, like the rest of the world, has become distracted by other world political events.

The recovery has been hampered by cultural consensus building, the lack of strong leadership, high debt loads, and massive scope of the damage.

The world forgets that at least 18,000 lives were lost by the resulting tsunami which wiped out more than 42 coastal cities and villages. More than one million buildings were destroyed and 600,000 people were left homeless.

Complicating the recovery has been Japan’s two decade economic malaise of high national debt,

The Japan Times recently reported that more than half of the mayors in the affected tsunami region believe that the reconstruction has slowed or stalled; most officials state that the work is behind schedule and work is not proceeding as initially planned or approved. Mayors in two towns contaminated by the Fukushima reactor meltdowns said that no progress has been made at all on any reconstruction of their area. All the residents in this area have been displaced because they had to abandon their homes due to radiation levels. The nuclear meltdowns still have not been fully contained three years after the disaster.



Many of the same officials believe that the memory of the disaster has faded among many people, including their own countrymen. They cite the fact that public attention is beginning to focus on the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

An NHK survey found that 80 percent of earthquake survivors were unhappy about the slow pace of recovery in their communities. Forty-four percent stated that there has been no progress in their recovery projects. Almost 92 percent were dissatisfied with the lack of housing or new housing lots.

Part of the snail pace of recovery has to do with the approval process. Local communities, usually led by a mayor or city council, polls their remaining citizens on what they would like to do to rebuild their community. However, there is rarely any unanimous agreement on where to rebuild their houses, towns and businesses because there is the chance of a tsunami disaster if they rebuild on the old coastal locations.

Municipal plans then must go up the government chain for review and approval at the prefecture level. At this point, finances and recovery aid becomes a real problem. Many plans are rejected on cost alone. This puts the municipality leaders back to square one with a more angry

constituency. Often times, this adds another year of delay as the original plan continues to be reworked. As time passes, more and more survivors leave their home towns to find work inland or down in the major metro areas.

One would think that there would be plenty of reconstruction work for all the affected villagers. But most of the coastal people were fisherman; their trade was the sea. Their ports and fishing areas were disrupted by the disaster, and there is a lingering radiation fear that affects their ability to market their catch.

Local businessmen found themselves heavily leveraged prior to the disaster, that they had no means to get new bank loans to rebuild their shops. Many factory owners had to walk away from their multi-generational factories.

The rest of the population were the elderly on fixed income state pensions. Japan has a very socialistic cradle to grave program. As the Japanese population continues to age rapidly, there are less young people to support the government entitlements or federal deficits to support those programs. Young professionals have been leaving the country to find high paying jobs in Hong Kong, China and elsewhere.

The evacuation centers became the cramped, non-functional nursing homes for most of the displaced elderly. They had no means to move to a new city. Many wanted to live and die in their family homes; to continue to grieve for their losses.

The world remembers the massive waves that roared through coastal streets, ripping a part building, and tossing large fishing boats like bathtub toys. The massive rubble piles were the eerie landscape that continued to persist after each anniversary year. It has been reported that the clean-up of the disaster debris is only 60 percent completed after three long years.

Town leaders have tried to urban plan their communities but have found their suggestions blocked by various levels of bureaucratic red tape. A few entrepreneurs have had enough and on their own have re-opened their community markets (on a small scale) just to keep their personal dreams of rebuilding alive. Once vibrant seaside town markets are now ghost towns or empty mudflats.

As the debris continues to wash ashore in the Western United States coastline, Americans do not realize that the Japanese recovery has stalled to a level of utter defeat. Many communities have vanished like Western mining towns from the 1800s. Relief donations have been down to a trickle like the last scraps from those closed mining operations.

Three years after the disaster has conclusively shown that change is a difficult process in Japan. The people's codependency on government to take care of their problems has been the greatest obstacle to their own recovery. The real disaster may be the human toll as a result of the constant recovery delays.



Those lost to history are doomed to repeat it.

Human history is filled with natural and man-made disasters. Depending on the culture and individual philosophy, most people soldier on in spite of such disasters.

A prime example is the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. Chicago was a boom town, but had the secondary status of a younger stepchild to Eastern elite cities. The type of person who journeyed to Chicago was a self-motivated worker looking to get a foothold (land) in the new crossroads of America. Chicago's location developed new markets in agriculture, commodities, transportation and financial contracts. Risks were rewarded to speculators and investors alike.

But in October, 1871, in the midst of a drought, most of the city caught fire - - - devastating the downtown business center. The boom town, mostly built of wood (including sidewalks and streets) went up like dry kindling.

As the city still burned, the Mayor, city council and business leaders met to plan an immediate response to the disaster. Mayor Mason signed a proclamation pledging "the faith and credit of the city of Chicago" to "the preservation of order...the relief of suffering," and "the pro-

tection of property." Other executive directives set the price of bread, banned smoking, limited the hours of saloons, and forbade wagon drivers from charging more than their normal rates.

This makeshift group of leaders also established a Relief Committee, with representatives from each of the three divisions. The committee's task was to organize and administer the distribution of food, supplies, and money that, thanks to the tele-



graphed reports of Chicago's distress, began arriving that evening. Contributions eventually totaling about five million dollars in value came from towns and cities across the nation and the world. Given the appalling circumstances, these first steps seem admirably clear-headed and practical.

But to those who felt that the dying out of the flames hardly meant the end of danger, they were not enough. In the wake of the stories of looting, drinking, and arson while the city was burning came reports that professional thieves from elsewhere

and local low-life were now eager to prey on weakened Chicago.

"The city is infested with a horde of thieves, burglars, and cut-throats, bent on plunder, and who will not hesitate to burn, pillage, and even murder, as opportunity may seem to offer to them to do so with safety," warned the *Chicago Evening Journal* a day after the fire. People distrusted the local government, but accepted the marshal law created to instill order in the chaos.

The privately run *Relief and Aid Society's* fire activities were considerably more long-lived, extending into 1874. Dividing the city into districts, the Society opened offices and supply depots connected by telegraph. It organized various contributions for shelter, employment, transportation, distribution, and health—each overseen by a designated committee.

The Society not only distributed food and clothing, but also made available the materials for several thousand simple "shelter houses," erected four barracks in different places throughout the city for the homeless poor, helped secure necessary tools and appliances to skilled workers, and vaccinated tens of thousands of Chicagoans against smallpox.

Its work was a model of a new kind of "scientific" charity, conducted by paid professionals carrying out the policies of an executive board.

From the ashes, Chicago took the tragedy to grow into a modern American city.