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Sunday, March 13, 2011

EDITORIAL

Massive quake hits Japan

With the memory of the Feb. 22 earthquake in Christchurch, New Zealand, still fresh, Japan was hit Friday afternoon by a massive earthquake centered offshore. It served as a terrifying reminder that big quakes can strike anytime and that the central government, local governments and residents must be prepared to help each other.

The quake, which occurred around 2:46 p.m. Friday, measured magnitude 8.8. It occurred 130 km east-southeast of Oshika Peninsula, Miyagi Prefecture, and the focal point was 24 km below the surface. The magnitude was larger than the 7.9 of the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, the most destructive natural disaster in Japan's history. Friday's quake followed a magnitude 5.8 quake that hit China on Thursday, killing at least 24 people and injuring more than 240.

The Tohoku region felt the strongest tremors, registering 7 on the Japanese scale of 7 in northern Miyagi Prefecture. It is feared that more than 1,300 people died Friday. Many deaths were caused by a once-in-a-hundred years tsunami — more than 10 meters in height at Sendai's new port.

It's possible that faults affected by the quake stretch for several hundred kilometers from the sea off the Tohoku region to the sea off Kanto. The government and residents must be ready for aftershocks that could continue for up to a month.

The government has decided to dispatch units of the Self-Defense Forces and police emergency rescue teams to areas hardest hit by the quake. The government must collect necessary information quickly and respond effectively. Lifelines including public-transport systems, telephone lines and cell-phone infrastructure must be restored to normal as soon as possible and a long-term goal should be to strengthen them so they hold up better during earthquakes.

As a long-term goal the government should hasten the completion of projects involving the construction or refurbishing of school buildings to resist quakes. For their part, private citizens should stock emergency supplies of food and water, and ensure that heavy household items are anchored to prevent injury.

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A piece of your mind

Scared or prepared?

The government [upped its casualty estimate for a killer quake-tsunami combo](#) by more than a factor of 10. What's your take?

- Forewarned is forearmed. This information will save lives.**
- All this does is scare people. It's not helpful.**
- It's inspired me to think more seriously about possible evacuation routes.**
- Numbers like these aren't much more than a guess.**

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