

JAPAN

AFTER THE TSUNAMI

In March, a deadly earthquake and tsunami triggered a nuclear disaster. Despite their fears, the people of this island nation are forging ahead.

FAST FACTS

AREA: 146,000 sq mi

(U.S., 3.7 million sq mi)

POPULATION: 128.1 million

(U.S., 312 million)

PER CAPITA GDP*: \$34,000

(U.S., \$47,200)

RELIGIONS: Shintoism, 84%; Buddhism, 71%; Christianity, 2%; other, 8% (The total exceeds 100% because many people observe both Shintoism and Buddhism.)

LANGUAGE: Japanese

LITERACY: 99% (U.S., 99%)

LIFE EXPECTANCY: males, 80 years; females, 86 years

(U.S.: 75/80)

*GDP stands for gross domestic product; per capita means per person. The amount is the value of all items produced in a country in a year, divided by the population. It's one measure of a nation's wealth.

Words to Know

- **bureaucrat** (*n*): one who follows rules in a mechanical way, usually in government
- **class** (*n*): a group of people at the same economic and social level

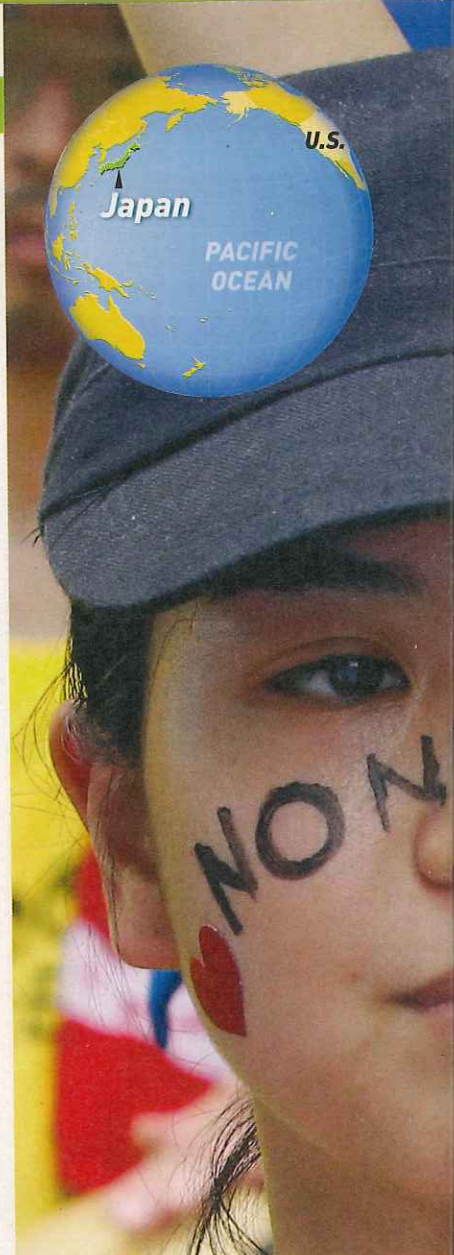
SOURCES: The World Factbook (CIA); 2011 World Population Data Sheet (Population Reference Bureau)

The first reaction was terror. Then came anger. Now, six months after a devastating earthquake and tsunami—and the worst nuclear crisis since atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945—the Japanese people are rebuilding their country. But fear remains a constant.

On March 12, the day after the tsunami rocked a nuclear power plant in the Japanese prefecture (district) of Fukushima, thousands of residents evacuated the nearby town of Namie (*see map, pp. 14-15*). Fearing that radiation leaking from the damaged plant would end up in their food and water, they took shelter in neighboring Tsushima.

Two months later, the people from Namie learned that the wind had actually carried radiation to Tsushima. Government computers in the capital, Tokyo, had detected the danger, but the people hadn't been told.

"We were in the worst place but didn't know it," Yoko Nozawa told *The New York Times*. "Children were playing outside."



Namie's mayor likened the government's silence to "murder."

In the months since, the people of Fukushima have had more to be angry about. After local officials assured them that their communities were safe, residents tested rice paddies and forests on their own and found high levels of radiation.

In August, authorities admitted that continued leakage may make large areas around the Fukushima plant uninhabitable for decades. "The effects might emerge only years from now," said a resident of Namie. "I'm worried about my kids."

The government's mishandling



A protest against nuclear power at Hiroshima, where the U.S. dropped an atomic bomb to force an end to World War II.

of the situation forced Prime Minister Naoto Kan to step down last month, leaving the Diet (Parliament) to choose a new leader.

Deep Distrust

The trouble began on March 11, when a 9.0-magnitude earthquake struck 80 miles off Japan's northeast coast. It was the country's strongest earthquake ever, triggering tsunami waves that surged as far as six miles inland and flattened entire towns. As of late summer, more than 20,000 people were counted as dead or missing.

The crisis in Fukushima rein-

“ Is it Japan's fate to repeatedly serve as a warning to the world about the dangers of radiation? ”

forced a distrust of nuclear power among older Japanese. Many of them lived through the aftermath of the atomic bombs the U.S. dropped in 1945 to end World War II (see p. 13). Yet, with few energy resources of its own, Japan relies on nuclear power to meet 30 percent of its energy needs—compared with 20 percent in the U.S.

“I don't think nuclear power is safe,” says Genya Takagi Davis, 10,

from his home in Kamakura. “The accident at Fukushima showed me that it's dangerous.”

Many Japanese agree. In August, at their annual commemoration of the bombing of Hiroshima, survivors were especially anguished. “Is it Japan's fate to repeatedly serve as a warning to the world about the dangers of radiation?” 81-year-old Masahito Hirose asked a reporter.

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Students in Fukushima have been given personal radiation-testing kits.

Thousands of people in northern Japan are still living in tents in school gymnasiums.



The Japanese soccer team celebrates its championship victory over the U.S. in the Women's World Cup in July.



Recently, the Japanese learned from their government that radiation from Fukushima has been detected in beef, rice, milk, and other products in the country's food supply. "It's a matter of serious concern," says Naoki Sakakibara, a student at Tokyo Institute of Technology. "Almost all Japanese no longer trust nuclear power."

The question is: With no oil, how can Japan meet its energy needs?

A Better Quality of Life

After World War II, the U.S. and its allies occupied Japan, rebuilding the country and helping to establish democracy. About 35,000 U.S. troops are still stationed in Japan to help provide for its defense.

By the 1960s, the country's outlook seemed bright. For decades, companies like Sony and Toyota had helped turn Japan into a manufacturing empire, which created a booming middle class. Steady, well-paying jobs were easy to find, and consumers had plenty of money to

spend. When Japanese investors bought Rockefeller Center and Radio City Music Hall in New York City in 1989, many Americans feared that Japan's economy would surpass that of the U.S.—much as they feel threatened by China's rise today.

But much of Japan's wealth was based on overvalued real estate and inflated stock prices. In the late 1980s, those bubbles burst, plunging the country into a long period of stagnation. Recently, China overtook Japan as the world's second-largest economy, nipping at the heels of the U.S.

Japan's confidence suffered a huge blow. "For those who came of age in the 1970s, there was a clear sense of destiny," says Rebecca Copland, a professor of Japanese language and literature at Washington University in Missouri. Now everyone, including college graduates, has a much harder time finding

permanent employment. "The certainty of hard work and fixed roles has crumbled," Copland adds.

This has led to a shift in Japanese society, with a greater focus on everyday pleasures, says A. Maria Toyoda, head of the political science department at Villanova University in Pennsylvania. "There is greater openness to ways of deriving satisfaction from life."

Genya Davis's father, Jeremy, an American who relocated to Japan several years ago, agrees. People are paying more attention to their lives outside work, he says. "Japanese are intensely loyal to their families. Loyalty to a company is a thing of the past."

In the wake of their greatest natural disaster, the Japanese people are encouraged by stories of resilience. When the tsunami struck, Little League players on baseball fields in northeastern Japan ran for



A Little League team practices amid the rubble in northern Japan.

their lives. Some players lost family members to the flood. Many others were among the 80,000 residents who were evacuated from their homes near the Fukushima plant and dispersed to temporary shelters.

Yet when it came time for the annual Little League tournament in Osaka, boys from Fukushima schools put together a team. It became a symbol of hope for the nation. “The players don’t feel sorry for themselves,” one of their coaches said. “They just acknowledge the reality of what they can do right now.”

Self-Reliance

Such an attitude is widespread, as the Japanese begin to rebuild their damaged cities. Because they may not trust the **bureaucrats** in Tokyo to look out for them, they’re trying to look out for themselves. “The efforts to save energy, become more efficient, and reconstruct after the disaster come from the grassroots [people],” says Toyoda.

Another shot of national pride came in July, when Japan’s underdog soccer team beat the U.S. in the Women’s World Cup. “Japan is coming back, and this was our chance to represent our nation and show that we never stopped working,” Homare Sawa, the team’s top scorer, told *The New York Times*.

Copland agrees. “The disasters have actually helped draw the nation together—across **class** and region and generation,” she tells *JS*.

“Japan in general is a culture of survival, of adaptation, and hard work,” Copland adds. “Japan is going to survive and be stronger for it.”

—Bryan Brown

Think About It

1. Why do many Japanese distrust their government?
2. How might Japan meet its energy needs without nuclear power?



HIROSHIMA AND NAGASAKI

Japan’s nuclear disaster is an eerie reminder of a tragic past. On December 7, 1941, Japanese planes attacked the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, crippling the fleet and killing more than 2,000 people. The next day, the U.S. declared war on Japan and officially entered World War II, which had already begun in Europe.

For years, the U.S. and Japan fought bitterly across the Pacific. At the same time, the U.S. developed the atomic bomb—a weapon more powerful than any the world had ever seen. On August 6, 1945, President Harry S. Truman ordered U.S. planes to drop an atomic bomb on the city of Hiroshima, destroying it within minutes. Three days later, the U.S. dropped a bomb on the city of Nagasaki as well.

Japan surrendered a few days later, bringing World War II to a close. In addition to war casualties, 150,000 to 225,000 Japanese died either directly from the bombs or from radiation-related illnesses.

MapSearch



Japan and Its Neighbors

A crowded island nation slightly smaller than Montana, Japan became a world power in the 20th century. It conquered Korea in 1910 and occupied most of eastern Asia during World War II.

After Japan's crushing defeat by the U.S. and its allies in 1945, the country reduced its army to a small "self-defense force." The U.S. helped it rebuild and become a democracy. By the 1970s, Japan had the world's second-largest economy. Its automobile and electronics industries began to outperform those of the U.S.

The most important U.S. ally in the region, Japan shares American concerns about North Korea's nuclear weapons program and China's growing economic and military power.

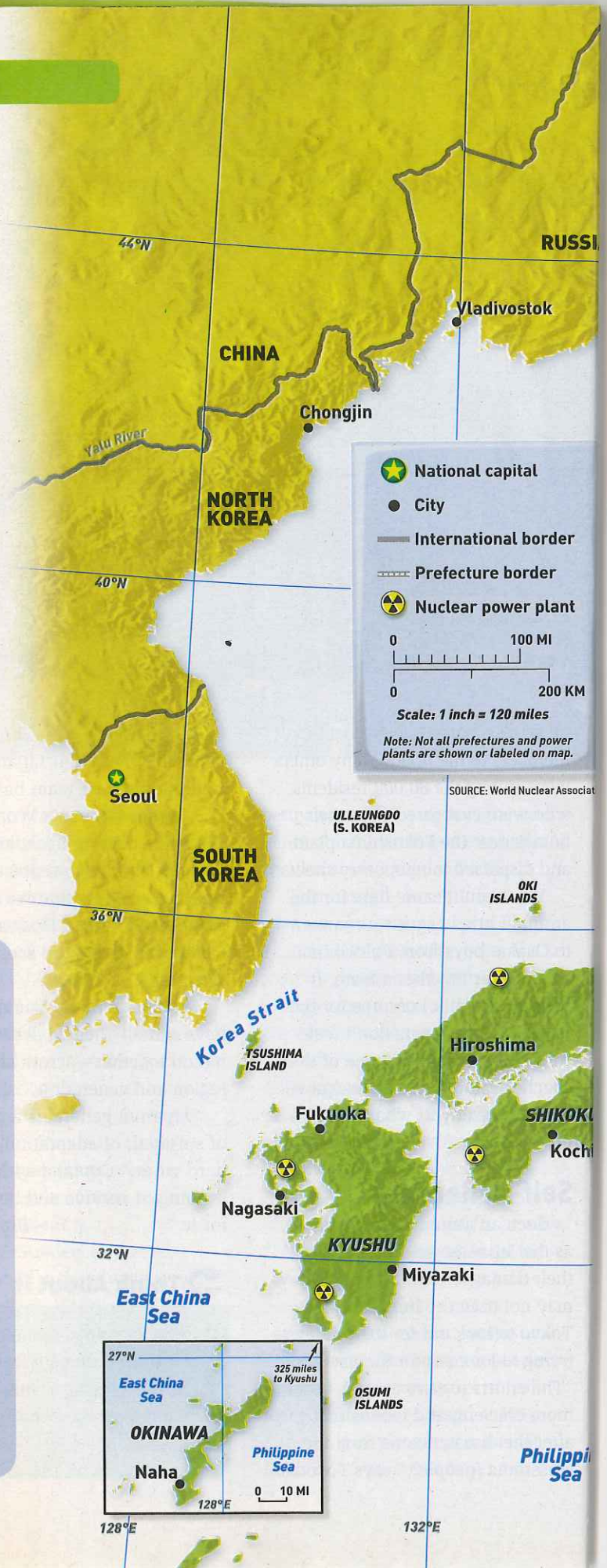
After studying the map and photos, answer these questions.

Questions

Write your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

1. What is Japan's northernmost island?
2. Which island is in the Korea Strait?
3. Which city is located at 33°N, 130°E?
4. About how many miles is it from the Fukushima nuclear power plant to Tokyo?
5. In which general direction does the train from Tokyo to Osaka run?
6. Which prefecture is closest to the epicenter of the March 2011 earthquake?
7. Which body of water lies between Japan and Russia, North Korea, and South Korea?
8. Where are most U.S. troops in Japan stationed?
9. About how many miles is it from the Oki Islands to Seoul, South Korea?
10. What are some of the regional concerns Japan shares with the U.S.?

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CHINA INTO SECOND PLACE

An automobile factory in China, whose economy overtook Japan's as the world's second largest (after the U.S.) earlier this year.



A NUCLEAR NORTH KOREA?

Dictator Kim Jong Il, center, is pushing North Korea to develop nuclear weapons.



U.S.-JAPANESE ALLIANCE

The U.S. has had a strong military presence in Japan since the end of World War II, particularly on the island of Okinawa.