

First Three Weeks of Catastrophe

One of the most scenic cities and residential areas in western Japan awoke to an endless nightmare on that fateful Tuesday, struck by death and destruction. But despair over losses and fears over the future have not given way to defeat as people begin the process of rebuilding their lives one day at a time

DAY 1 (Jan. 17)

5:46 a.m. — A massive earthquake registering magnitude 7.2 on the Richter scale devastates southern Hyogo Prefecture, toppling buildings, houses and elevated highways and rail lines. Numerous fires break out in Kobe, ravaging the city's downtown area throughout the day and night. The quake at first registers six on the Japanese scale of seven in Kobe and in Hokudan, Awaji Island.

Noon — The National Police Agency reports the death toll at 203, with 331 listed as missing.

2 p.m. — The Meteorological Agency says the quake was probably caused by a lateral shift in a fault below Awaji Island.

4 p.m. — Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama, at a news conference, describes the quake as the worst one to strike an urban area since the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 and pledges all-out rescue efforts.

The death toll rises hourly, sometimes by more than one hundred. By midnight, casualties are reported at 1,590 dead and 1,017 missing.

Relief efforts are under way for Kobe's new homeless

By AKEMI NAKAMURA

About 92,000 residents were forced to take refuge at 332 gymnasiums, parks and other temporary shelters after being left homeless by an earthquake that devastated Kobe.

They received snacks, water and blankets provided by the municipal government.

The local government set up a task force and started gathering damage information and taking steps to support evacuees.

The task force also asked local businesses, including Daiei Inc. and Co-op Kobe, to help supply emergency provisions for the city's 1.5 million residents.

"My apartment did not collapse. I came here (to Kobe City Hall) to try to get information about aftershocks. I can't get any

information because I don't understand Japanese," said an Indonesian man accompanied by his family.

Kobe was hardest hit by the quake among cities and towns in southern Hyogo Prefecture.

In the city, an eight-story building, a three-story hotel, a key building at Ikuta Shrine and hundreds of wooden buildings collapsed, trapping people under rubble.

City officials said houses and other structures were crushed at 757 locations.

Widespread damage to roads was also reported.

Three sections of the Hanshin Expressway collapsed in Kobe and nearby Nishinomiya, taking dozens of cars with them, police said.

As many as 146 fires broke out in the city of Kobe alone, burning up an area about 100,000 square meters in total by the evening. A fire that destroyed an entire shopping arcade in Nagata Ward, and two more blazes in Suma Ward, including one in the Terada district, were still raging as of midnight, fire department officials said.

All but one person trapped beneath the