

Foreigners hit hard

Kobe's long-established foreign community is also devastated, suffering more than 230 deaths

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The Great Hanshin Earthquake has shaken foreign communities that have endured in Kobe and nearby cities for decades, leaving more than 200 dead among 77,000 businesspeople, students and their families from about 100 countries.

Especially for Kobe, foreign communities have been an integral part of its modern history since the port city was opened to foreign trade in the mid-18th century.

An estimated 100,000 foreigners were registered as living in Hyogo Prefecture before the quake. Kobe alone accounted for about 45,000, according to the prefectural government.

The exact figure of non-Japanese killed in the quake was not immediately confirmed, because "it is hardly possible to accurately sort out foreigners from the toll list released by police," a prefectural official said, adding that the list puts names only in kanji and katakana.

The prefectural government estimates that at least 235 foreigners were killed. Many say such figures do not tell the whole story because they apparently fail to include "illegal" status foreigners who, without proper registration, do not officially exist in Japan.

The Korean community, the largest group of foreigners in the area, comprising about 54,000 South and North Korean nationals, had lost about 150 people as of the end of January.

Many of the deceased lived in Nagata Ward, which was home to 15,000 Koreans, according to the Hyogo Domestic Office of Korean Residents Union in Japan (Mindan), a pro-Seoul organization. The area had severe fires during the first few days after the quake.

All 200 South Korean students survived but a student's wife was killed, according to South Korea's consulate in Kobe.

Three weeks after the quake, about 1,700 Korean families were staying at temporary shelters, and others went to relatives' homes in Hyogo and Osaka prefectures, according to the Hyogo Prefectural Headquarters of the pro-Pyongyang General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (Chongryun).

Fifty Chinese residents, including 11 students, two of their family members, and one researcher were confirmed dead, according to Kobe Overseas Chinese Association and People's Republic of China consulate in Osaka.

About 12,000 Chinese residents live in the Hanshin area. By the middle of the second week after the quake, some restaurants in Kobe's popular Chinatown began to reopen for business. On Jan. 31, the Chinatown residents held a scale-down version of the traditional Lunar New Year celebrations.

Two Americans were confirmed dead, and four were severely injured, according to the Osaka American Center. Some of the 1,500 American residents have left for Osaka, Kyoto, Tokyo or Southeast Asian countries.

Among the estimated 2,000 foreigners from Canada, Australia and European nations in the area, one Australian man was confirmed dead.

Some reported col-

lapse or severe damage to their homes, according to consulate officials.

As of early February, some foreigners who work for companies in Osaka were staying at hotels and looking for apartments there, while many residents who used to work in Kobe returned to their home countries, went abroad or were staying at friends' houses in Japan, the said.

Most of about 750 Vietnamese residents in Kobe were staying at temporary shelters, while about 50 went to Himeji, the second-largest Vietnamese community after Kobe. About 600 Vietnamese live in Nagata Ward alone.

Although there were no confirmed Vietnamese deaths, one man was reported in serious condition after a bicycle accident.



Volunteer efforts