

aired special news programs, according to Video Research Ltd.

With seconds, minutes and hours passing mercilessly by, the lives of many ended under the debris and in towering flames.

Those who survived stood by helplessly.

Slow-arriving teams of soldiers and other over-burdened rescuers dug into collapsed houses and apartment buildings only to carry out corpses covered in blankets. There were occasional moments of joy, when they were able to save those who survived long hours of pain and hunger in subfreezing temperatures.

The survivors could not afford much time shedding tears over what they had lost. The more than 300,000 people who found themselves without homes were forced to endure life at temporary shelters

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scattered around some 1,000 locations. They had little food, no bathing facilities and no flush toilets. Objects that most had taken for granted in everyday life suddenly became luxuries.

Like countless other disasters, the Great Hanshin Earthquake has also taught many lessons. It exposed the wretched fragility of highly advanced urban infrastructures.

Through the sacrifice of more than 5,300 lives, the pain of nearly 27,000 others who were injured and the suffering of those who lost their homes, the earthquake proved the inadequacies of life-saving efforts: Highways were blocked by rubble and traffic, firefighters were incapacitated by cutoff water pipes; rescue teams had no equipment to remove debris to save those buried underneath.

With mass-transit systems destroyed in the core of Kobe and nearby cities, evacuees and relief workers, the old and the young, walked, pedaled bicycles or rode motorcycles for kilometers and for hours through the havoc to bring whatever they could to the ones they care for.

Lifelines were instantly disrupted by the fierce vibrations that lasted a mere 20 seconds, leaving tens of thousands of households that withstood the quake without water, power or gas.

Despite the hardship, the survivors were patient and orderly. Whenever water trucks arrived or stores reopened to sell whatever they had, people formed orderly, long lines, and there was no obvious looting.

Hyogo Prefectural Police said 25 burglaries and 242 cases of bicycle and motorcycle thefts were reported during the first nine days of the quake, but no felonies were filed. The number of burglaries was about one-sixth of that in the same nine days of 1994.

A woman staying in a makeshift shelter outside her demolished house near the Sagawara Shopping Arcade in Kobe's Nagata Ward said she was sharing the relief goods she received with her neighbors.

"People are so kind to all of us. We really appreciate the good will of others now," she said.

Even strangers, from the young to the old, exchanged a few words to encourage each other and to show they care when carrying water or cleaning up streets.

At a service station in Nishinomiya, Hyogo Prefecture, that survived the tremor, young workers asked customers, mainly on motorcycles, where they came from and whether their families were safe.

While quake survivors were latching on to their own prowess, the national and local governments came under harsh attack both at home and abroad for what was criticized as benign neglect.

The nation was appalled by Tokyo's lack of leadership and absence of crisis management in the initial hours after the quake, while local governments fell into chaos with many officials themselves becoming victims.

Without solid information on the extent of the damage, Prime Minister Tomichi Murayama first left the quake in the hands of the National Land Agency, which had



no information-gathering network of its own nor authority over other government agencies, including the Self-Defense Forces.

Neither the prime minister nor Defense Agency chief Tokuchiro Tamazawa ordered SDF troops to rush to the quake zone even though the law stipulates that such rescuers can be dispatched without a request from prefectural governors.

It wasn't until more than 21 hours after the quake that the chief of the Ground Self-Defense Force's rescue operations called up all available ground troops to prepare for their missions.

The national government also failed to respond quickly to assistance offers that