



Side-by-side KYODO

would answer some questions. He shook his head.

"I had to get out of the second floor window," said Shuzo Kakitani, whose house withstood the quake, which registered the maximum 7 on the Japanese intensity scale.

"We pulled out a woman in my neighborhood and took her to a hospital. But she died. More people are still under these houses," he said. About eight hours had passed since the temblor, and no rescue had arrived.

"I went to my company in Nada Ward (in Kobe), but couldn't go in. Now we are cleaning up inside the house so that my neighbors can spend tonight together," he said.

As I walked into Kobe along the route, the cityscape turned increasingly catastrophic, and lines outside phone booths became longer with frustrated people.

Because I had left my watch at home that morning, I asked a young woman in a 2-meter-long queue in front of a pay phone

what time it was.

"I couldn't bring my watch. My apartment was destroyed. So I'm taking shelter at a kindergarten," she said. "I'm calling my parents to tell them I'm all right. Don't worry about my phone call. It won't be long."

A 62-year-old man said he would go back to the remains of his house to retrieve some belongings. "(When the quake occurred) I was trapped in debris and cried for help for about 10 minutes, but nobody came. So I kicked a wall and got out of the house with my injured wife. Two couples living next to my house died," Masaharu Arimura, a security company employee, said.

"I haven't eaten anything since this morning. No information came to us," he said.

Across the street from Arimura's house, local construction workers used a crane to pull out the body of a boy from a house that no longer had a first floor. His mother tightly held the small corpse wrapped in a blanket, crying the boy's name over and over again, while the instant rescue team moved to another location.

Twilight was falling on the devastated area, and the January cold was getting severe. Families carrying bags and backpacks and a group of young women pulling colorful ski bags on casters were heading in the direction of Kobe or Osaka. Bicycles and minibikes weaved through them. Some families used cardboard and plastic sheets to set up temporary shelters at a parking lot.

At around 4 p.m., I hitchhiked a ride from a compact Audi in Higashi-Nada Ward. "My house in Rokko (Nada Ward)

was OK. I went to the vet in Nishinomiya where I work. Some pets fled. My parents went to see their company in Kitano (Chuo Ward, Kobe)," Megumi Matsumoto, a veterinarian worker, said.

I thanked her for the ride and got off at a point about 4 km from Sannomiya. To report on what I had seen to the Tokyo office, I ran the distance to Kobe City Hall in darkness, guided only by headlights from cars and trucks jammed on National Route 2 and bonfires in parks.

It was around 7 p.m. when I reached the 30-story Kobe City Hall, where power was being supplied by an emergency generator. A hundred evacuees had taken shelter in the lobby.

On the eighth floor, city officials and some reporters were working in a conference room bustling with tension, and I felt safe in the familiar scene of bright fluorescent lights and ringing telephones.

A blurred television in the room reported that 1,042 people were confirmed dead and 577 missing at one point, and the city's task force for the quake reported 77,700 evacuees were staying at 318 temporary shelters in Kobe.

These figures continued to rise.

I spent the night with a little cold food and no water. I filed handwritten stories by fax. The morning after the quake, the city's central Sannomiya district was quiet, and roads and buildings were covered with rubble and dust.

Two days later, I took a ferry from a damaged pier in Meriken Park to Kansai International Airport so I could take a train back to Osaka. On the ferry, my traveling companions on the voyage were an Indian businessman with his family who was trying to go abroad for a while, an American couple who visited their cousin in Kobe from Alaska two days before the quake, two other Americans teaching English who were heading for Osaka to visit their friend and 100 other foreigners and Japanese.

Taking a Rapi:t limited express to get to the heart of Osaka, I sat next to a young woman from Kobe. "I felt guilty for leaving Kobe. My neighbors I had hardly talked to (before the quake) were very nice to me, sharing their food," she said.

"It's strange now to see a city like this (Osaka). It looks like nothing ever happened, in Osaka," she said.