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Blackout Nippon: Notes from 03/2011□□日本停電—2011年3月ノート

Adam Lebowitz

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3/23 Shuzenji, Shizuoka, .0045 MicroSieverts

I write this by candlelight. Interesting times.



A fractured and dislocated Shrine tori'i gate with the second crossbeam on the ground, Tsukuba, Ibaraki

Reactor 3 of Fukushima 1 spewed black smoke of an unknown substance this afternoon. Tokyo reported elevated levels of cesium in tap water in excess of those recommended for infants and pregnant women. Same with spinach from Ibaraki, milk from Fukushima (no surprise there) and selected produce from Chiba.

Meanwhile, the number of dead and missing from the combined earthquake-tsunami has officially exceeded 20,000. Hundreds of thousands will likely continue to live in shelters through the summer.

The fishing industry of Iwate and Miyagi and the communities that support and benefit from it will, assuming ocean currents are not too irradiated, likely re-build. Acts of nature are accepted, or rather, demand to be. My wife's hometown suffered a devastating flood in 1958 when the Kanogawa River in the Izu Peninsula, swelled by a typhoon, swallowed half the population of the lower part of Shuzenji. My father-in-law had just established a bull semen business with his brother-in-law, but it too was washed away. As a result, he became a weekend agriculturalist and entered banking; his partner devoted himself to his veterinary practice and tanka.

How the farmers of Fukushima, Ibaraki and Northeastern Kanto will be able to reestablish themselves during this man-made crisis is, to say the least, questionable. There is no doubt, however, that the media has accorded them a special sympathy. "We were just doing our job. Why are we being punished?" said one, sounding Job-like in his anger toward a corporate deity. The Central Union of Agricultural Co-operatives (aka JA) is also up in arms and looks like it is ready to do battle with

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Tokyo Electric: A clash of titans if ever there was one.

Meanwhile, the city administrators around the Hamaoka nuclear facility in Shizuoka held an open meeting with Chubu Electric a few days after Fujinomiya suffered a magnitude 6.4 jolt. Spoke the mayor of Kakegawa: "I don't want to hear that things are going to be 'OK' if there's a 7-point quake or an 8-meter swell, because I won't believe you." The gloves have come off, and well they should: The Great Suruga Bay Quake has been on everyone's date books – "A 70% chance in the next 30 years," goes one quote. If Fuji-san decides to blow her top in the process, well, there's little that can be done; if the nukes meltdown, however, the effects are terrifying.

Which brings us back to Fukushima. The level of general technical knowledge is high in this society, meaning a great number of people have a fairly decent knowledge of "how things work". Which presents the obvious question (posed by my wife, actually): Why on earth was equipment responsible for pumping water through the facility placed with so little protection on the ocean side of the plant where it could be taken out so easily by, say, a tsunami?

This is just one of several questions that have and will continue to be asked, not only by "Japan Hands" but by those in the country. One thing that strikes me is the "GE" insignia adorning the wall of the control panel of Fukushima 1. Could it be that the basic plant design was simply transplanted? I'll leave that answer to more investigative minds, but I will indulge in one statement: Nippon is reaping the benefits of fifty years of short-term thinking.

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The Great 3/11 Earthquake hit us at home in Tsukuba.

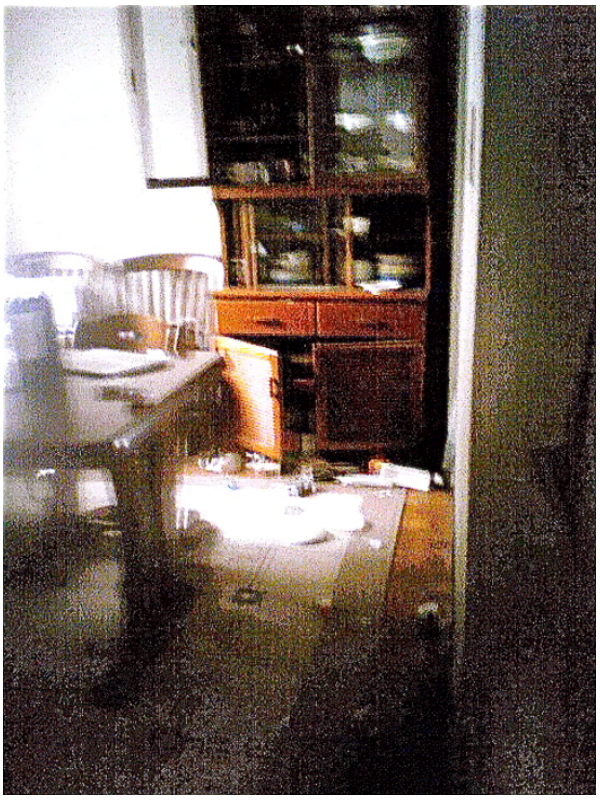
It was early afternoon. My daughter, as it happens, was at home with me. Seven pupils from her first-grade class were out with influenza and the rest given a 2-day sick leave. It was just time for our afternoon snack, and prior to that I was just finishing an e-mail to my mother who was due to come at the end of the month.

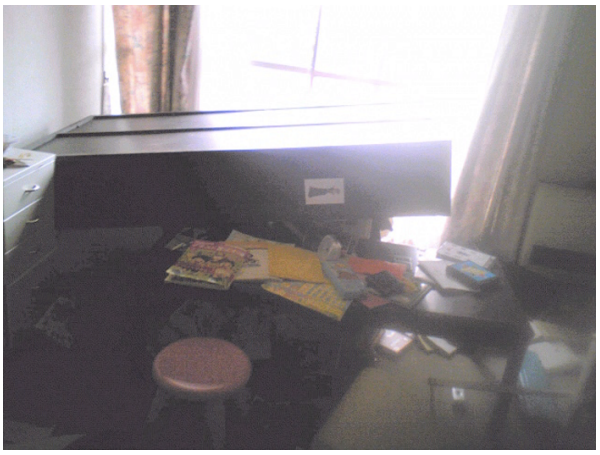
My daughter had just come up the small flight of stairs to the dining area when things began shaking. It started slowly and not too differently from countless other quakes we experienced.

Around the tenth second or so, things began to move more violently. I grabbed my daughter and we stood underneath the sturdy kitchen doorframe. Then things began to really move, and I began to hear things falling from their shelves. My daughter rang out with a "Kowai!" which told me something extreme was happening and required decision-making. I made the wrong one – grabbing her and making a mad dash outside – but we lived to tell the tale. I banged-up my shin struggling through the genkan putting on shoes, and once outdoors sat on the ground outside the house as open targets for falling roof tiles.

The quake lasted a good minute and a half, maybe more. When it finished, I carried my daughter to the grassy expanse that acts like a courtyard to our housing development. The mother of our Chinese neighbors was crouched with her little girl (my daughter's classmate) and their baby. The mother of the Japanese-Australian family was also there with her three daughters. It struck me that my daughter was without shoes, so we both went indoors. Luck saved her again from my stupidity as she jumped from my arms and ran in the house, because she did not cut her feet on broken glass.

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Open china cabinet with broken crockery and glass, fallen bookcase

"Sugoi!" she exclaimed, and so it was. The china cabinet had popped its doors and half the contents were in shards on the floor. The living room bookcase had sprung its screws bolting it to the wall and tipped over. Same with the dresser in the bath area, although the adhesive meant to prevent it from doing so was still on the floor with part of the base. Let this be a lesson: Cheap furniture will betray you.

We went outside again. It was obvious there was no power, and possibly no gas. Shakers continued as aftershocks. The housing manager-kanrinin was outside and we gathered around his car listening to the radio, and the news was bad. Parts of Sendai were flattened or in flames. A typhoon had taken out a massive shoreline area in Iwate and Miyagi. Tokyo, it seemed, was still intact.

Our Chinese neighbor predicted rain was coming due to the quake; no sooner said than come. I opened the doors of our new station wagon, equipped with TV. The news showed images that could charitably be described as "catastrophic".

People around us, greatly concerned about loved ones, began contacting madly. My wife Noriko was in Tokyo.

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3/25 .0048 Microsieverts

Three workers suffer injuries from puddles of radioactive water in the turbine chamber. Elevated radioactivity in five prefectures. Korea considering a ban on all goods. Australia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, China all screening.

Hard to see how economy will recover if this keeps up ad infinitum.

Report on shelter at elementary school in Ishinomaki, Miyagi. Two weeks later and still not enough water. Can't cook rice, water for washing comes from pond on school grounds. Sufficient supplies have arrived (finally), but no distribution. Ad Council-Japan public service

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announcements account for half the commercials during midday talk-shows: Don't hoard. Unplug. No unnecessary phone calls or mailing. Fukushima-ken has become the new disaster area.

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Directly after the quake electricity was cut, meaning phones were down. Cell phones were also not responding; systems had been weakened, plus there was an overload. Finally a text got through from Noriko: Her company had let everyone go, but the trains were not moving so people were hoofing it.

Our Bangladeshi neighbors drove in from the center of town with another friend who had, as it happens, just arrived that day, along with other foreign students. I quickly told them that electricity was out, and gas and water questionable. They went indoors. In the meantime, not knowing what else to do and still fearful of aftershocks, I loaded the car with essentials: water from what still flowed from the tap, bottled juice we still had in the house, toilet paper, sanitary wipes, some crackers.

I then noticed that children were being led home by their parents. I flagged one group over: "Get to school. Bring 'em home."

The primary school where my 5th grade son attends is a 7-minute run away. I grabbed his heavy coat and set out after ordering my daughter to stay in the car with our friends. All the children at school were lined up in the playing field by grade and class. I signed out on the teacher's clipboard – herself a mother of two and undoubtedly anxious to return home – threw my son his overcoat, shouldered his bag, and brought him home. Like his sister, he seemed remarkably unfazed but very excited: the beginning of a new adventure. He was brimming with questions. I filled him in on what little I knew: 1. His mother was still in Tokyo, and 2. Things had fallen down in the house and there was no power.

I went to take a leak in some nearby bushes. It was the fifth time in the last hour. My son joined me.

After arriving home we let his sister out of the car. They both wanted their jump ropes. Fine, I said, but stay in front of the house out of the parking lot. I went inside and began to clear the living room of debris from the fallen bookcase. I tried again to communicate with Noriko, to no avail. And soon the children would require feeding.

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3/26 Numazu .0043 Microseiverts

The kids are with their grandmother in Shuzenji, and I'm out alone and drunk after spending several hours at Brian Baird's Fishmarket Taproom.

8pm, and the *shôtengai* shopping arcade in front of the station is practically dark. Everyone's closing early, though apologetic about it.

One train an hour. Numazu to Mishima, then the choo-choo from Mishima to Ohito. This must be the first time Hakone Tetsudô is on a reduced schedule since the war.

On board, everyone waits patiently. A short, compact conductor is standing in one of the cars looking unusually stern. He even has a red bilingual armband: "Keibi/The Guard".

Suddenly, my inner "Japanologist" is aroused: Tokyo '23! The Kempeitai are back! Contact Mikiso Hane! Even though he detrains soon after departure, I am still palpitating upon arriving in Ohito and run into my friend's pub.

He seems understandably unfazed.

"We're not in Manchuria know, so there's less chance of a coup d'état," he assures me.

Seems to make sense. I ask for a Kirin. Since

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I'm out of yen I order it on the house, and my friend obliges.

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The kitchen was partially inaccessible because of broken glass, and I was still in paralysis over concern for Noriko's return, so cooking was out of the question.

Our neighborhood was darkening and I ordered the kids inside. One of the neighbors said the center of town still had electricity. Perhaps restaurants would be open. I loaded the kids in the car and said we were going to look for one.

Sure enough, there were lights on. Everything seemed open, but blinds were drawn. Obviously there was no service. We passed drug stores with lines of people stretching through parking lots. After making a couple of passes through commercial areas, I decided that it was probably best to make do with something at home despite our lack of electricity or gas.

We arrived back at home feeling I had just wasted gasoline (fortunately I had filled it the day before so we never had to experience those shortages), and decided the only way was to cook outside, or at least thaw some frozen curry over a fire. My skills of baking sweet potatoes did not fail me: one match, some newspaper, and some dried wood we kept leaning against the house. The grill was soon aflame. I slid a lump of frozen curry into the pot and placed the pot on top.

There was no light save the fire, a Mini-Mag, and my cell phone with its dwindling battery. The kids were, thankfully, calm and safely inside playing hand-held computer games. I focused my attention on the grill; an already overtaxed fire and rescue brigade didn't need any more problems.

After the curry had melted and seemed hot enough I removed it from the fire and set to dousing the grill. Satisfied the resulting slurry did not represent a fire hazard, I brought the pot inside.

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I first visited Miyako, Iwate in the Spring of 1992 during a Golden Week trip from Osorezan in Aomori to Aizu, Fukushima where I was living. Staying in Youth Hostels along the Sanriku-Kaikan shoreline, the stop before Miyako was Kuji. There was a multi-colored pebble beach that shown diamonds when the tide went out. The local hostel there was an abandoned primary school run by a half-dozen *pū-tarō* layabouts. Ask them a question and the likely answer was "I don't know." But the day-trips were great: Somewhere deep in the Iwate mountain hinterland to a tiny mura. The Bā-san's came up to my waist. They held a "Suisha-Matsuri" since a few waterwheels still functioned. I tried using a grindstone attached to a pulley mechanism to masticate soybeans for soymilk. I used to be really keen on that kind of stuff.

Next stop, Miyako. The hostel was the back-end of a ryokan where we were "budget guests". Although lower on the rung, we were still served first-class sushi. It was fantastic, save my allergic reaction to those raw oysters. My survival was fortunate because the next day took me to nearby Jōdo-ga-Hama washed in white.

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Geijutsu-no-Mura, Sonchō-san's house

My second memory of Miyako involves an old eccentric named Sonchō-san, so named because he actually built his own "art village": Geijutsu-no-Mura. Literally hand built. There were several wooden gōya cabins, including one with a tree inside. One with a bath on the roof. A mirrored outhouse. A bus with the seats removed installed with bunks. Every summer he had his own "matsuri" – which I heard about while working at a Yokohama natural food store – around a stage. This festival had more longhairs than bā-san's, but what fun: Three days and nights of music and revelry, confetti and moonshine. Gamabara-Never!

Sonchō-san's mura was well in from the shore. So far his name isn't on the casualty lists, so I'm assuming he's ok.

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After putting the fire out, I brought the melted curry inside and poured it over rice still chilled from the fridge. The kids ate by candlelight, uncomplaining, then returned to their games. I bolted some nattō with the leftover rice, took a slug of vegetable juice as a supplement, and dragged the children's futons from upstairs. I decided we'd sleep together downstairs in the living room close to the genkan. Although there were constant aftershocks, there was nothing else to fall over. I directed them by flashlight to the sink to wash hands and face – no electricity meant no bath – and crammed them into futons in track suits in case we needed a quick escape.

Still no word from Noriko, save an earlier message – "Walking with friends."

I crash on the sofa both excited and hyper and implored the kids to put their games away. Who knew when power would return, and they may need them tomorrow. It was total darkness. I listened to a bit of battery-powered radio, but it was a constant stream of death and destruction from NHK. I silenced it, and slept on and off.

I was off sleep when the phone clicked and whirred, and modem lights flashed like a Christmas tree. The stairway light flicked on. Praising the genius technicians of the local utilities board, I immediately went to charge the cell phone and make a quick overseas call.

I can't remember how much time passed after that, but around 2 a,m. the call from Noriko finally came through. She had walked 20 km with a senior colleague and was met by his wife who drove them to Ryūgasaki Station where I was to meet them. The highway was untenable due to inbound traffic and was directed to take the old surface 2-lane, Route 6. I piled the kids into the car with their blankets.

22.8 km. 30 minutes. 60? 90? 90-something, anyway. Stop-and-go. Stop. Stop. Another call. And another. At least she's genki. Self-Defense Force trucks rumble in the opposite direction sporting white and red banners: "Special Consignment". Kids in junior high and high school uniforms are still biking and walking their way home. It's an endless line to Tokyo. Finally, heaven-sent GPS directs us to an off-road and ten minutes later we find the station and are back together again. We thank, profusely, Noriko's boss and his wife for bringing her this far. We return via near-empty back roads and stop at a convenience store for ice cream and a toilet. Only one out of two's

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available: No water means no flush.

And no batteries, for the great panic hoarding had begun.

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3/27 Tsukuba, Ibaraki .19 Microsieverts

Tokyo Electric announces "difficulties" in clearing the turbine chamber of contaminated water, feared to have levels of Iodine-134 over 10 million times the normal level. Toyota, Mazda, and Honda's operations overseas slow due to reduced shipment of components. Sony Music decides to delay new releases, and SoftBank Mobile the new Apple i-Pad 2.

3/28 .18 Microsieverts

Tokyo Electric apologizes: The element in question is not Iodine-134, but Cobalt-56. This is apparently much more benign, but it still appears two steps back for every one taken forward. Nuclear refugees from Fukushima are refuged at Dōhō Park, ten minutes from our house. Iwaki license plates fill the parking lot.

3/29 .18 Microsieverts

An organic cabbage farmer from Fukushima has committed suicide. Plutonium is detected in soil and ocean samples from around the plant. A friend on faculty at the U of Tsukuba Medical School is sent to Iwaki, and tells me the city has become a "ghost town".

3/30 .17 Microsieverts

Partial meltdown in Reactor 2. The Chairman of Tokyo Electric, the President having suffered a nervous breakdown, announces we are in for the long – read "several decades" – haul. Possible future tableaux include dropping box-like circus tents over the reactors or clouding the entire area with dispersants, hopefully with better accuracy than the water drops. Dairy and nattō shortages persist, not only due to contamination but to a shortage of packaging materials because paper and ink facilities in the north were destroyed. This will also affect production of magazines and cigarettes.

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We arrive back at home 4 a.m. the morning after the quake.

After sending a quick e-mail message to my mother to tell her we are all together, I go to bed for a few hours. At eight the next morning I'm up and checking to see if the Internet connection is still holding. It is. We have power and gas, but the other concern is water: nothing. The city hall home page announces water distribution at a local park. It is very chilly, so I put on my long joins and heaviest coat and grab all the empty Pet bottles we have in the house.

When I cycle to the park a line is already forming. Some families come better prepared with campsite water tanks, some less with cooking pots. I felt I was with the latter group, but I had filled a few bottles yesterday evening, and at least I did not have to use the car. Thirty minutes passed, and the line stretched further. Finally two hand-pumps were set up to take water directly from the underground tank. The line progressed briskly, and I filled up, went home, and then out again to the local market.

It was ordered pandemonium. Water, toilet paper, and cup noodles are the most popular items. Everything smells of spilt wine. Items from the refrigerator cases – dairy, fresh meat and fish, tofu – are not sold because they might have spoiled when the power was off. I stock up on eggs, mochi, bottled tea and juice, some dried noodles. Despite the rush, my favorite dried koya-tofu was as unpopular as ever, meaning there was plenty for me. I procure one bottle of water.

The unsung heroes of these first few days – along with the mail and newspaper delivery -- are the register ladies who keep the lines

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moving. Although exhausted from having to clean the night before, they handled us over-shopping customers with professional aplomb.

I arrive home with three bags of groceries and tell Noriko about the dried tofu. “No surprises there. Eat something.” She’s prepared some mochi which I take with juice. Then I start to simmering, with as little as water as possible, some dried tofu which will be my meal for the next two days.

That afternoon is spent answering e-mails and checking sites for as much local and national information as possible. It is clear our area and Ibaraki prefecture had escaped much of the damage, and so we were feeling very, very lucky. The TV images of the north were heartbreaking. While our home and community are intact and connected with the outside world, it is the complete opposite in much of Tohoku. The casualty figures continue to mount. 1,500. 3,000. 5,000. 10,000.

Our pressing daily needs keep me focused. Water, mainly. Noriko is concerned about work. I am on Spring Break, and the children are in the last two weeks of school. Noriko’s also concerned about food.

“Any meat?”

“None. Couldn’t sell anything fresh.”

“Nothing at all?”

“Processed stuff. Packaged wieners, etc.”

“Get some.”

So, I’m back to the market to buy meatballs, sausage, and bacon. I also pick up some frozen udon noodles they are letting go. There are virtually no beverages left.

I return and check the taps: a trickle, but at least it’s there. I tell Noriko.

“Quick! Fill the tub!”

I do so and heat it up. We are able to enjoy a bath for the first time in two days.

Next day brings a new shock: A nuclear reactor in Fukushima has exploded.

The next week passes in a blur. I am an adrenalin-filled shut-in. At least, that is what my wife says I smell like. My children complain of halitosis (mine). When not biking like a mad-man for food, water, and medicine, I am stuck to the sofa sending mail and checking news. Is outside safe to hang laundry? For the children to play? To breathe? At some point I send a message to the BBC World Service describing our condition. A half-hour later, a youngish-sounding intern-producer is calling: Would I do an interview?

So, in the midst of a triple disaster, my three-minutes of fame have finally arrived. It happens via Skype. Then more e-mails to the world: “Check me out!”



And more requests for interviews came. Preparing my evening sound-bite prioritizes my life. What to say? How to say it? Fame is tempting, but compromising: Do I really want to announce family plans across the planet? Plus there is the fear-mongering: “Do you believe the government? Aren’t you scared of fallout?”

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So far, radioactivity levels are twice the normal rate, but cumulatively less than a chest x-ray, CT-scan, or a transcontinental flight. Therefore, being outside was safe. When the fourth request for an interview came, I did something unwise: I asked the go-between if I could have thirty seconds to make a statement.

"Why?"

"To make a comment about media coverage."

"Let me ask my editor…(several seconds pass)…No good. This isn't a platform for your opinion…Oops! No time for the interview now. Bye!"

Thus endeth my media career.

Disgruntlement, but short lived. Yet even as water was restored (thankfully), anxieties about Fukushima were beginning to bite. Embassies begin calling their nationals home. Foreign students leave or go to Osaka. Beijing gives the order to return and taxis Chinese citizens back, including our neighbors (Fare-thee-well, Lius!)

However, we are committed to staying. Noriko's job and our children's school and friends keep us. Tsukuba will stand! And yet…

…a message from a friend arrives on the 18th, one week after the quake. Psychiatry professor at the U of Tsukuba. Can enjoy imagining worst-case scenarios on par with Woody Allen. Two sentences:

"Go to Shizuoka now. The big melt's this weekend."

This final straw breaks my nerves and I am forced to sit down with the other adult in the house.

"Why not go? It's a 3-day weekend, after all. We can stay the week to see what happens."

"I'd have to call my mother and ask her. Also, I'm coming back Tuesday so I can go to work. Commuting to Kudanshita in Tokyo from home is out of the question."

"Maybe I'll come back, too."

"What for? The university doesn't need you now. Plus, I can escape easily from Tokyo if something happens. If you're stuck in Tsukuba, you're on your own."

"*Wakatta*. I'll stay with the kids at your mother's."

We drive down the next morning, passing long lines at the gas station. Tank lorries recently filled with petrol are lumbering in the opposite direction: Yokohama's storage facility is back on line. The Shutokō bypass in Tokyo is unrealistically clear. Same with the Tōmei taking us to Shizuoka. In no time we are in Oyama outside of Gotemba. Fuji-san is perfectly white and perfectly impassive. We pull up at the Oyama Rest Area next to a station wagon with Fukushima plates.

Inside for breakfast ramen, and rice porridge for me, where the environment is friendly, relaxed, and removed from recent events. After we carry our trays to the eating court, I excuse myself and step outside. We are directly below Fuji-san who appears foreboding yet strangely accessible. After performing a small puja, I lean against a pillar and have a minor meltdown behind my sunglasses.

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3/31 .16 Microsieverts

PM Kan announced today that he felt the country's plan to build more nuclear facilities should be "re-considered". He then met with French President Sarkozy. Mixed signals greet the new normal.

Our personal situation is extremely fortunate. Our home was undamaged, we have jobs, the children have school. Radioactivity in the air in

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the immediate environment is not a deep concern, although from now on readings will be announced on the radio with the weather. The nuclear power lobby won't be distributing free promotional material at schools and libraries anytime soon.

In contrast, sufficient food and fuel are still a problem in refugee centers in Iwate and Miyagi. It is unseasonably cold. Most vulnerable are the elderly. The stress, cold, lack of medication, and general disruption in care have raised their mortality rates significantly. Despite this, hospital and elderly care workers in and around the disaster and contamination zones – including Filipina staff far from home – continue to labor in extraordinarily difficult conditions. They are as much heroes as the boots on the ground trying to control the reactors in Fukushima. And when the displaced populations of Fukushima will be able to return home is anyone's guess.

And that is not all. Closer to our home, Urayasu City in Chiba is literally sinking. When the quake caused the reclaimed land to settle underneath the pavement, water rushed to the surface and flushed through roads and walkways. There are now "manhole towers", and homes still lack the basic utilities: water, electricity, and cooking gas.



"Manhole Tower", Urayasu, Chiba

Even the Magic Kingdom is not immune to soil liquefaction; Tokyo Disneyland is located in Urayasu and its closure gives "castles built on sand" fresh meaning.

Throughout the crisis, the current government has been the target of criticism for not being "prepared". Surely, the government was not prepared for this triple attack on the national infrastructure. It is possible that no models outside of war exist for this situation. The one "preventable" ("human-caused") component – the reactors – can be blamed on "short-term" thinking. But is any nation investing in nuclear power truly "thinking long"?

Another popular critical trope is that bureaucracy is preventing aid from reaching the affected areas. This argument may have relevance, since the culture of administration is extremely strong in this country. However, the

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problem now may not be that there is too much administration, but quite the opposite: There may not be enough of it, since local municipalities have literally disappeared. Supplies are reaching the area, but the distribution network is incapacitated.

Kan himself has been singled out for not providing "leadership," not being in the "forefront" of the relief effort. He is clearly out of his depth. But this is not his skill set: he is a legislator, not a crisis administrator. To his credit, he has delegated well: Chief Cabinet Secretary Edano Yukio's youthful vigor and litigation skills have served him well. However, this is not a political system geared to producing "leaders", which actually might be a good thing. Recent LDP PM's – such as the far-too-long-Koizumi and the thankfully-too-short-Abe – tried to be "leaders", but were in fact chauvinists with deleterious public agendas (such as cutting support for solar power development).

In fact, the LDP cannot score political points now because the party has never been tested in crisis. In 1995, during the Kobe Earthquake and Aum Shinrikyo subway sarin attack, the PM was the Socialist Party's Maruyama Keiichi. If recent administrations are taken as examples, were the LDP in power now the chauvinist lobby would be given even greater voice and the public calls for "national unity" even more strident. At least now, Gov. Ishihara's "heavenly punishment" statement so shocked even the Establishment Right that the old bigot was forced to withdraw and apologize (although he may be re-elected yet!). Bertolt Brecht said it best: Pity the country that needs heroes.

This is not to say that the "Strength Through Unity" message via SMAP on the TV doesn't disturb me somewhat. However, the 2010's are not the 1920's, and the world is much more interconnected. If something positive has come of all this, it is a thaw in relations with China. The chauvinist lobby (of whom I have friends and colleagues) may suspect intentions, but by dispatching rescue teams, aid, and even a crane-like fire truck dubbed the "Giraffe", China has been a friend in need.

Hopefully this will also be part of the "new normal", because recovery will require massive effort. Communities physically destroyed by the earthquake and tsunami will have to be rebuilt, with jobs and housing for the displaced. However, how and when the reactors will be stabilized is still not certain, and the blowback from this crisis concusses every sector: Agricultural and maritime production and imports are impaired; manufacturing capacity will decrease due to power shortages; foreign investment will be seen as risky; fewer tourists and academic exchanges; even possibly rising medical costs due to stress-related illnesses. Essentially, Nippon's regeneration may well depend on a reappraisal of economic and social priorities. At the very least, relations with the nuclear power industry must be reconsidered, with hopefully a wider discussion of what obligations the nation state has toward its citizens. If new models for producing and consuming goods, and for providing energy -- in short for living -- are found perhaps the country will, unlike its fantasy counterpart, no longer be a castle built on sand.

After a Quake

After a quake

it's hard to speak

when people meet

they just repeat

they can't awake

it's hard to sleep

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after a quake.

The ground feels rough

days are short

nights are cold

you feel old

walking is tough

you lose your hold

when the ground is rough.

For basic need

you often find

you wait in line

a steady climb

to feed your greed

you need more time

your basic need.

After the quake

there's no "today"

it seems delayed

it can't be weighed

it won't awake

since all is frayed

after the quake.

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