

Earthquake rocks western Japan, 38 reported dead, 200 missing

TOKYO (AP) — A powerful predawn earthquake slammed western Japan on Tuesday, reportedly killing at least 38 people, injuring hundreds and leaving hundreds more trapped in the rubble of collapsed buildings.

The earthquake, with a preliminary magnitude of 7.2, was believed the most violent to have struck a densely populated urban area in Japan in at least two decades.

The quake sparked fires throughout the major port city of Kobe, 280 miles west of Tokyo, where the quake was barely felt. It was felt strongly in Osaka, Japan's second-largest city, about 22 miles east of Kobe.

Japan's public television, NHK, reported 38 deaths, but the toll was expected to climb.

Up to 200 people were believed buried in rubble in the western city of Ashiya, a posh residential area near Osaka,

NHK reported.

In Kobe, a portion of elevated expressway collapsed, and a major fire was raging near the city center in Kobe. Smoke billowed over large sections of the city.

Deaths were also reported on Awaji Island, located in the Inland Sea off Kobe and epicenter of the 5:46 a.m. (3:46 p.m. EST Monday) earthquake.

Japan is one of the world's most seismically active areas, but this quake's destructiveness shocked even Japanese rescue officials.

"I've never felt such a large earthquake before," said Takeshi Sakamoto, head of rescue operations on Awaji Island, where the quake was centered.

The Cabinet was to hold an emergency meeting to discuss disaster measures. Stock trading was suspended for the morning on the exchange in Osaka, about 22 miles east of Kobe.

More than a dozen aftershocks rattled the area in the three hours following the quake. More aftershocks were expected, adding to fire danger from broken gas mains.

Trains were derailed by the force of the quake. Power was knocked out in some areas and underground pipes burst, sending water gurgling onto streets.

People huddled in the streets, wrapped in bedding, some bleeding from cuts and scrapes. Television showed footage of a woman climbing from the window of an inn in which others were believed trapped.

The shaking lasted about 20 seconds, according to survivors. The jolt was strong enough to twist doorframes, making it difficult to escape from buildings.

Telephone service was disrupted by the quake. Callisto Kobe and Osaka yielded recordings saying they could not be connected.

Bush looking forward to inauguration

AUSTIN (AP) — Poised to become the state's 46th governor, George W. Bush said Monday, "I can't wait for noon tomorrow."



Bush

At noon Tuesday, Bush becomes only the second Republican to hold the state's top office since Reconstruction.

Appearing at a Republican Party fund-raising luncheon with former GOP Gov. Bill Clements, Bush got a preview of what awaits him.

"If you can't be president, the next best thing is governor of this great state," said Clements, 77, who was elected in 1978 and 1986.

Bush and Lt. Gov. Bob Bullock, a Democrat re-elected last November, will be sworn in at noon in ceremonies on the front steps of the Capitol.

Outgoing Democratic Gov. Ann Richards is traveling in California and won't attend, her office said. Bush praised her for

being "extremely helpful" during the two-month transition period.

With one eye on final preparations and one on the weather, Bush made a whirlwind tour of Austin on Monday.

He appeared at receptions, spoke to the GOP luncheon, met with the news media and attended an evening musical gala. His father, former president George Bush, planned to attend the evening concert.

"I am fully prepared to be your governor. And I can't wait to do so. It is a huge honor," the governor-elect said.

Offering a preview of his inaugural address and plans for his four-year term, Bush said he expects a good reception from the Democratic-controlled Legislature to his calls for reforming welfare, education, juvenile justice and the state's system of civil lawsuits.

"It's a result of having won an election by 352,000 votes, particularly one in which I stressed issues and philosophy. So long as I stick to philosophy, I've got an excellent chance ... of having substantive reform," he said.

Forecasters for rain on Tuesday had organizers hoping for the best, with outdoor inaugural events to include the noon swearing-in, a barbecue on the Capitol lawn and a parade through downtown Austin.

The two days of festivities for Bush and Bullock are expected to cost about \$1.5 million, said Inaugural Committee Chairman Donald Evans.

Evans said two-thirds of that total, about \$1 million, is coming from corporate donations. The remainder is coming from ticket sales, he said.

Some citizens' groups contended that the companies are seeking to win influence with the new administration. Bush disputed that, saying the corporate contributions help keep the events affordable for all.

"This is not any undue influence being gained here," he said. "It means that citizens can pay \$2 for a barbecue meal and \$10 for a gala ticket. As a matter of fact, I found out for the first time who was underwriting the inauguration when I read the program."

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THERAPY OR ABUSE?

Hospital chain exec pleads guilty in bribe scheme

By STEVEN L. REED
 Houston Chronicle Staff Writer

DALLAS — A former vice president of the Psychiatric Institute of America pleaded guilty Monday to taking part in a nationwide bribery and Medicare fraud scheme and pledging to cooperate with federal investigators.

Peter Alexis, 44, is the highest-ranking official of the chain of psychiatric hospitals to be charged in the alleged scheme and is the first company executive to say that wrongdoing was part of a company-wide plan.

National Medical Enterprises said in April that it may pay \$25 million to settle federal and state fraud investigations. The settlement would not protect current or former employees from prosecution for making a false statement to the government.

Investigators claim PIA, then a subsidiary of National Medical Enterprises, paid kickbacks to doctors and therapists for referring patients to PIA hospitals and for inflating bills for patients covered by Medicare.

Alexis, a U.S. District Judge Joe Kendall postponed sentencing indefinitely while Alexis cooperates with the FBI and federal prosecutors. The investigation will focus on other PIA executives as well as recipients of the bribes, according to a source close to the case.

Kendall said during Monday's arraignment that some physicians may be sleeping poorly now that Alexis has entered into a plea bargain with the Justice Department.

Curtis said that if Alexis cooperates, the government will consider asking Kendall for a reduced sentence.

The two charges to which Alexis pleaded guilty carry punishments of as much as 10 years in prison and a \$500,000 fine.

PIA was a subsidiary of NME from 1992 until 1994 when it became a division of the company. Alexis worked for PIA in Fort Worth and Dallas from November 1988 until December 1990. He was regional vice president for Texas from June 1989 until December 1990, overseeing 13 hospitals.

In January, a federal grand jury in Topeka, Kan., indicted the former chief executive of an NME psychiatric hospital and one of its doctors.

—Houston Chronicle
 June 28, 1994

If you were treated at one of the hospitals listed below between 1986 and 1991, please take note.

The company that operated these hospitals, National Medical Enterprises (NME), has been prosecuted for improper treatment of patients and insurance fraud. Federal and state authorities have investigated or prosecuted NME, and a number of insurance companies have successfully sued NME and recovered losses.

According to NME documents and court records:

- company hospitals admitted patients without clinical evaluations by licensed professionals
- NME owned hospitals billed insurance companies for treatments that never occurred
- a Vice President of an NME company pled guilty to paying bribes and illegal kickbacks to secure insured patients for their psychiatric hospitals

If you were a patient at any of these hospitals, call to find out more:

- Arbor Creek Psychiatric Hospital (Sherman)
- Baywood Hospital (Webster)
- Bedford Meadows Hospital (Bedford)
- Brookhaven Psychiatric Pavilion (Dallas)
- Cedar Creek Hospital (Amarillo)
- Colonial Hills Hospital (San Antonio)
- Laurelwood Hospital (The Woodlands)
- Psychiatric Institute of Fort Worth (Fort Worth)
- Stafford Meadows Hospital (Stafford)
- Twin Lakes Hospital (Denton)
- Willowbrook Hospital (Waxahachie)

KEY QUESTIONS FOR FORMER PATIENTS

- ▶ Were you admitted to the hospital without an evaluation by a psychiatrist?
- ▶ Did anyone discuss your discharge plan prior to treatment?
- ▶ Were you discharged when the insurance benefits were exhausted?
- ▶ Were you hospitalized longer than you felt necessary - because of remaining insurance coverage?
- ▶ Was the focus of your hospitalization your insurance coverage?
- ▶ Did your treatment include therapies such as art, recreational dance, music or biofeedback?

If you have further questions or information about this case, please call between 8:00 am and 9:00 pm.
 (800) 470-0663
 659-7600 in Houston

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