

Japan begins earthquake relief mission

A mammoth relief mission swings into action in north-east Japan, a day after a devastating earthquake and tsunami claimed thousands of lives

Whole villages have been washed away and at least one town has been largely destroyed. Police said about 400,000 people have fled their homes. The tsunami was triggered by Japan's biggest earthquake since records began. Meanwhile, nuclear officials said they were checking whether a damaged reactor had gone into meltdown. The Government had earlier declared a state of emergency at several nuclear reactors as cooling systems failed. Analysts say a meltdown would not necessarily lead to a major disaster because light-water reactors would not explode even if they overheated.

The 8.9-magnitude tremor

struck in the afternoon local time last Friday off the coast of Honshu Island at a depth of about 24km, 400km north-east of Tokyo. It was nearly 8,000 times stronger than last month's quake in New Zealand that devastated the city of Christchurch, scientists said. Japanese police said thousands of people died. The country's military has mobilised thousands of troops, several hundred planes and many ships for the relief effort.

The quake triggered a tsunami up to 10m, with waves of 7m battering the Japanese coast. A muddy torrent of water swept cars and homes far inland, turning residential areas and paddy fields into a la-



Rescuers work in Sendai which most suffered from natural disaster

goon of debris-filled sea water. One of the worst-hit areas was the port city of Sendai, in Miyagi prefecture. The town of Rikuzentakada, in Iwate prefecture, seemed mostly under water, with barely a trace of any buildings.

Japan Railways said it could not trace several trains along the north-eastern coast, and a ship carrying 100 people was also reported missing. Several fires were reported

in Kesenuma, in Miyagi prefecture, and one-third of the city was also said to be under water. Some 1,800 homes were reported to have been destroyed in the city of Minamisoma, Fukushima prefecture. Additionally, a dam burst in north-eastern Fukushima prefecture, sweeping away homes.

More than 280 aftershocks have rattled the country. In central Tokyo, a number of office workers

spent the night in their offices because the lifts stopped working. Millions of commuters were stranded overnight and others walked home after train services were suspended. Most services have now resumed.

Japan is having to launch a humanitarian effort of epic proportions. There are food and water shortages and about 2m households were without power several days after the earthquake.

Tobacco displays to be banned from shops

Tobacco displays in shops will be banned in England as part of a package of measures to discourage smoking

Instead, cigarettes and other products will have to be kept under-the-counter from 2012 for large stores and 2015 for small shops. A consultation will also be launched on whether manufacturers should be forced to put cigarettes into plain packets. A fifth of adults smoke — a figure which has remained steady in recent years after decades of rapid falls.

Both steps have been under discussion for a number of years with legislation to ban the display of tobacco products put in place by the Labour Government before it lost power last year. The coalition had initially said it wanted to review the plan before proceeding. A number of countries, including Canada, Ireland, Iceland and Finland, have already introduced similar bans, while Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are moving in that direction. If England goes ahead with the plan to force tobacco companies to put cigarettes in plain, unbranded packets it will be the first country in Europe to take such a tough line. Australia is due to introduce the measure in 2012.

The plain packaging measure is only a proposal at this stage and will be put forward for consultation.

Eurozone 'agrees in principle' on policy co-ordination

Eurozone leaders reach agreement in principle on a pact to co-ordinate economic policies

In Brussels, Eurozone leaders have tried to find a way out of the debt crisis that has dogged the region for more than a year. Earlier, Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou had called for Europe to take 'strong decisions'. A pact would give members a say over each other's major economic policies — a move

aimed at keeping countries under firm fiscal discipline.

A new permanent, extended replacement for the 440bn Euro bail-out fund was discussed. The markets most keenly want to see signs of progress on the establishment of the new European Stability Mechanism. At 500bn Euros, this will have double the effective lending capacity of the current European Financial Stability Facility, which was used in the bail-out of the Republic of

Ireland. Persistent fears about the levels of debt in some European countries, notably Greece and Portugal, have caused their cost of borrowing to again reach record levels in recent days.

Meanwhile, Spain, one of the countries the markets fear may next need a bail-out, had its credit rating downgraded amid fears about the ability of the Government to restore its finances and about the cost of restructuring its banks.

New Carnival after gangs neutralised in Rio slums



Samba school's revellers participate in Carnival parade

Rio de Janeiro's annual Carnival parade kicked off to the sound of drums, dancing and fireworks

An estimated 800,000 revellers turned out for the festivities, including Brazilian model Gisele Bündchen and football star Ronaldinho. Each year, Rio's 12 best samba schools battle it out to be crowned Carnival champions.

One dancer from the Portela school insisted first prize was not important. "It's simply great to be here. The large crowds give us a lot of energy," she said. One month ago, a fire destroyed most of Portela's costumes, putting their participation in doubt.

The winning samba school, judged on choreography, music, dancing and

creativity, is regarded as triumphantly as any winning football team. But the fun and frolics are not just confined to Rio. Similar events are taking place in towns and cities across Brazil.

The keys of the city have been handed over to King Momo — it must mean its Carnival time in Rio de Janeiro. Youngsters got the party started as children from 17 samba schools paraded through the streets of the Brazilian beachside city. The schools work with 40,000 children from some of the poorest areas, teaching dancing but also art and other projects.

The children threw themselves whole heartedly into the show in front of a cheering public. The Rio Carnival is the biggest in the world and draws huge crowds from the four corners of the globe.



Pablo Picasso's *Nude, Green Leaves and Bust*

Most expensive painting goes on show in UK

World's most expensive painting ever sold at auction going on show in the UK for the first time

The work, called *Nude, Green Leaves and Bust*, was painted in 1932 by Pablo Picasso and is based on his muse, Marie-Therese Walter. The painting, which was sold in New York last year for \$106.5m, will go on display at the Tate Modern in London next year. Tate Director

Nicholas Serota said, "This is an outstanding painting by Picasso. I am delighted that through the generosity of the lender we are able to bring it to the British public for the first time."

The painting has been borrowed from the unnamed private collector who bought it. It is not known what security precautions have been taken at the gallery to protect it from thieves and vandals.

Oil eases on OPEC production hike talk

Oil prices, which have shot up because of the Libyan uprising, fell back after Kuwait's Oil Minister said OPEC was considering boosting production for the first time in more than 2 years

Iran — the current holder of OPEC's rotating presidency — said there was no need for that as consumer worries over supply are mostly 'psychological'. Petrol prices near all-time highs in the USA caused the White House to reiterate

that it could tap its strategic oil reserves in order to safeguard economic growth. The Obama administration is under pressure, particularly from the US Congress, to look to the emergency oil supplies as an option.

OPEC member are discussing whether to call a special meeting to talk about increasing production. Saudi Arabia, the world's largest oil exporter, is already pumping more to fill the gap left by Libyan exports.