



The Road to Recovery

A new pupil walks in front of cherry blossoms in full bloom after an entrance ceremony at Kamaishi Elementary School in Kamaishi, Iwate Prefecture, April 20.

Two months have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake struck, and with all the relief support going to the disaster-affected region, the recovery is well underway. Thanks to the cooperative efforts of the Japan Self-Defense Forces and the U.S. Army in clearing the debris at Sendai Airport, which was hard hit by the tsunami, air passenger services resumed on April 13. The Tohoku Shinkansen was back in full operation on April 29, from Tokyo to

Shin-Aomori. Construction of temporary housing is moving ahead as well, with 30,000 dwellings scheduled to be completed by the end of May in Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima Prefectures.

Business is returning to normal, as well as infrastructure. Many factories were damaged by this disaster, including automobile, semiconductor, and LCD (liquid crystal display) plants. However, according to a survey of fifty-five major nationwide manufacturers conducted by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry in mid-April, 60% of the plants that were damaged (seventy plants at the fifty-five companies) have already been restored, while the remaining plants are expected to be repaired within one to three months. As a symbol of the recovery of Tohoku as a manufacturing center, new cars produced for export since the quake at the factory of one major auto manufacturer that was damaged in the disaster were shipped from Sendai Port on April 16.



Workers prepare to drive new Toyota cars onto a cargo ship at Sendai Port, Miyagi prefecture, April 16.

REUTERS/AFLO

The recovery at tourist spots that were damaged by the tsunami and earthquake is proceeding as well, with preparations being made for accepting visitors. Among those recovering is the tourist area of Matsushima in Miyagi Prefecture, with the 260 islands of various sizes in Matsushima Bay making it one of Japan's most notable natural scenic spots. The tsunami struck Matsushima too, flooding its shopping district and roads. But because of the buffering effect of the islands, the damage was comparatively limited. Already at the end of April, sightseeing boat tours around Matsushima Bay, the aquarium, souvenir shops, restaurants, and tours to the historic shrines and temples around Matsushima Bay have resumed operations.

Normal life is also returning to the cities. On April 21, opening ceremonies were held at 273 elementary and junior high schools in Iwate and Miyagi Prefectures.

In Sendai, Miyagi Prefecture, both the home of pro baseball's Rakuten Golden Eagles, the Kleenex Stadium Miyagi, and J. League soccer's Vegalta Sendai, the Yurtec Stadium Sendai, were damaged by the earthquake. But on April 29, both stadiums hosted their first games since the disaster, and were filled to capacity,



Prime Minister Naoto Kan delivers an address at the first meeting of the Reconstruction Design Council in Response to the Great East Japan Earthquake, April 14.

with around 20,000 spectators attending the Rakuten game, and 18,000 going to the Vegalta match.

In the government as well, in order to "give hope and courage for the future to the residents of the disaster-affected region, and assemble reconstruction plans as soon as possible for a rebirth of a rich and vital Japan through the combined efforts of all Japanese citizens," the Cabinet has called for experts

to form the Great East Japan Earthquake Reconstruction Design Council, chaired by Makoto Iokibe, president of the National Defense Academy of Japan. At the first meeting on April 14, Prime Minister Naoto Kan addressed the first meeting, saying, "I want this council to not just present a plan that will return the concerned region to the ways it once was, but that will creatively reconstruct all over again."

In this month's issue we present the disaster-affected region as it works towards recovery, and the people that are making it possible.

