No. 1
National
Massive earthquake and tsunami hit Japan

A devastating earthquake with a magnitude of 9.0 struck off the coast of Japan’s Tohoku region to the Pacific on March 11, 2011. The strongest earthquake ever recorded in Japan triggered a huge tsunami that submerged coastal areas and washed away scores of people, buildings among other important things.

As of early April 13, more than 13,000 people were reported dead and over 15,000 are missing from the quake and subsequent tsunami. Yet, the death toll could rise further as the nation tries to comprehend the enormity of the catastrophe. Many of those who survived have been enduring night after night in refugee centers.

Japan’s Emperor Akihito delivered an unprecedented video message on March 16 to express deep concern over people affected by the earthquake. “I was greatly moved by the bravery of survivors who are encouraging themselves in trying to live on through this enormous disaster,” the Emperor said in video footage released by the Imperial Household Agency.

The speech was the first in which the Emperor expressed his feelings on video. He also expressed hope that affected people will never give up hope and will take care of themselves to keep continuing their lives from tomorrow.
Japan earthquake poses debate over safety of nuclear power

Despite public apprehension over safety, nuclear power was on the rise to gaining acceptance as a stable, nonpolluting source of energy. Now, that idea is under serious reconsideration after reactor failures at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station in Japan caused by a magnitude-9.0 earthquake and a subsequent tsunami on March 11, 2011.

Japan is struggling to avert a severe meltdown at the nuclear power plant in Fukushima Prefecture. Yet, the disaster has triggered an alarming chain of events, such as the failure of emergency cooling systems, the forced release of vapor containing trace amounts of radiation into the atmosphere, and some reactor core meltdown.

In the wake of the catastrophic events, Germany has temporarily shut down seven nuclear power plants that began operating before 1980. Meanwhile, in France, green groups have demanded their country end its reliance on nuclear energy. In the United States, lawmakers are considering placing a hold on all nuclear power program development until the world fully understands the impact of what has happened in Japan, according to a U.S. senator.

Yukiya Amano, Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), described the situation in Fukushima as very serious. “The priority remains stabilizing the nuclear reactors and restoring safety,” Amano said, adding the agency needs to reexamine its role in nuclear safety after the crisis.
Ueno Zoo’s giant pandas given Japanese names

A pair of giant pandas that arrived at Tokyo’s Ueno Zoo from China in February 2011 have been given new names—the male, Ri Ri and the female, Shin Shin. The Tokyo Metropolitan Government picked their names from 40,438 suggestions collected from the public across the nation.

The name Ri Ri uses a specific Chinese character for power while the name Shin Shin uses the one for truth. The two giant pandas are being leased to the metropolitan government for 10 years at a charge of $950,000 (about 79 million yen) a year, with the money going toward wild animal preservation.

China has been using pandas as a tool of international diplomacy for decades. Many pandas have been given or leased to other countries. It was back in 1972 when China donated a pair of giant pandas, Lan Lan and Kang Kang, to Japan to mark the normalization of diplomatic ties between the two countries. The pandas were a big hit with the Japanese public.

Some people might think that the annual rental fee for the two pandas is too high. Yet, it is hoped that they will help bring Japanese and Chinese closer together at a time when Japan-China ties are at a low ebb in the wake of a Chinese trawler’s ramming of the Japan Coast Guard patrol vessels near the Senkaku Islands in September 2010.
No. 4
National
Tokyo Sky Tree reaches its full height

Still under construction in Tokyo’s Sumida Ward, new landmark tower Tokyo Sky Tree reached its full height of 634 meters on March 18, 2011. The height of 634 meters (the numbers six-three-four can be pronounced as MU-SA-SHI) was decided upon, as the area where the tower stands used to be a part of Musashi province.

A massive earthquake, followed by aftershocks and tsunamis, ravaged the Pacific coast northeast of Tokyo on March 11. Yet, it did not cause any damage to the Sky Tree’s structure, which prides itself on its anti-seismic design and technology.

Construction of the broadcast tower started in July 2008 and it surpassed the 333-meter Tokyo Tower in Minato Ward as Japan’s tallest structure. The project is led by Tobu Tower Sky Tree Co. with Obayashi Corp. standing as the tower’s principal builder. The estimated construction cost is said to be around 65 billion yen.

On March 1, Tokyo Sky Tree became the world’s tallest free-standing broadcast structure, outdoing the 600-meter Guangzhou TV Tower in the southern Chinese province of Guangdong. When completed, it will have observatories at both the 350-meter and 450-meter levels. Tokyo Sky Tree is scheduled to start operations in spring 2012.
No. 5
World
Twitter celebrates its fifth anniversary

Twitter was born five years ago when co-founder Jack Dorsey sent out the first message on March 21, 2006. Since then, it has been serving as a platform for about 140 million tweets per day around the globe. The site enables its users to send and read messages called “tweets,” which are text-based posts of up to 140 characters.

“Twitter has matured and made an impact in the areas of social responsibility, politics, sports, media, and more. The people who use Twitter have made it what it is today, and on our fifth birthday, it’s the people that make Twitter special who we are celebrating,” said Biz Stone, one of Twitter’s co-founders, in a blog posting.

Since its creation in 2006, Twitter has grown steadily to claim over 200 million users. Stone says that nearly 500,000 new users sign up each day. In such a short period of time, Twitter has changed the way many communicate and interact with large crowds of people online.

Also, the site has become an invaluable tool for spreading breaking news, such as Michael Jackson’s death, the Egyptian revolution, the Haitian earthquake and the recent quake and tsunami in Japan.
British royal wedding held on April 29

The wedding of Prince William, second in line to the British throne, and Kate Middleton took place on April 29, 2011 at Westminster Abbey in central London. Prince William proposed while on holiday in Kenya and the couple got engaged in October 2010. He reportedly gave Ms. Middleton his late mother’s engagement ring because he wanted Princess Diana to be part of his special day.

Ms. Middleton met Prince William while they were students at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland in 2001. A daughter of middle-class commoners who operate an online party-supply company, Ms. Middleton became the first person of non-noble or non-royal lineage to marry a future king of Britain since the 1600s.

Prince William and Ms. Middleton set up a gift fund to allow well-wishers who want to give them a wedding gift to donate money to charities they care about. The fund focuses on five causes chosen by the couple.

On April 29, about 1,900 people attended the wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton. Japan’s Crown Prince Naruhito and Crown Princess Masako were invited to attend the wedding, but decided not to following the massive earthquake that hit northeastern and eastern Japan on March 11.
French luxury goods group LVMH (Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton) has agreed to buy Italian jeweler Bulgari for about 3.7 billion euros, Reuters reported. The agreement was announced on March 7, 2011. The Bulgari family is selling its 50.4% controlling stake in its 127-year-old company in exchange for 3% of LVMH.

Established in 1884, Bulgari has been a strong brand in the luxury market and is renowned for its jewelry and watches. The deal is expected to strengthen LVMH’s competitiveness with Richemont, the Swiss luxury goods conglomerate, which boasts the Cartier brands. LVMH includes fashion brands Louis Vuitton, Fendi, as well as champagne house Moët & Chandon among many others.

LVMH’s CEO and chairperson Bernard Arnault said, “The alliance between my group and the Bulgari family is a perfect combination from all points of view as we share the same culture in terms of respect for identity and roots of the brands, quest for excellence, creativity, and innovation.” Arnault also said, “I am certain that our partnership will be greatly beneficial to Bulgari as well as to the LVMH Group.”

Similarly, Paolo Bulgari, chairperson of Bulgari, and Nicola Bulgari, vice-chairperson, said, “We found in Bernard Arnault and the Group he has built all the elements that are required to guarantee the long-term future of Bulgari.”
Obituary

Hollywood star Elizabeth Taylor dies at the age of 79

Legendary actress Elizabeth Taylor died of congestive heart failure in Los Angeles at the age of 79 on March 23, 2011. Known for her dazzling beauty and tumultuous love life, the Oscar-winning film star was laid to rest at Forest Lawn Cemetery where her close friend Michael Jackson is buried.

Born on February 27, 1932, Taylor made her screen debut at the age of 10. Then, the dark-haired, violet-eyed young actress gained fame at age 12 when she played a girl who tames the fury of a wild horse in the 1944 film *National Velvet*.

In a career of some 70 years, she received two Academy Awards for best actress: one for portraying a high-class call girl in *Butterfield 8* (1960) and for being hard-drinking Martha in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966).

While filming the lavish *Cleopatra*, Taylor started an affair with her married co-star Richard Burton. The pair first wed in 1964 and divorced in 1974, only to remarry in 1975 and divorce again in 1976.

Later in life, Taylor became a social activist. When her friend and co-star Rock Hudson (in *Giant*) died of AIDS in 1985, she started to raise awareness on and money for research into a cure for the disease. British actor, Sir Michael Caine paid tribute, remembering her as “a beautiful woman, a wonderful actress, and a great human being.”