

Iceland national day

2011 is a year for Japan to look into alternatives

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AMBASSADOR OF ICELAND

Destruction and death by the forces of nature are nothing new in the histories of Japan and Iceland. Icelanders felt a deep sense of sorrow for the Japanese people as the loss of life became evident following the March 11 earthquake and tsunami.

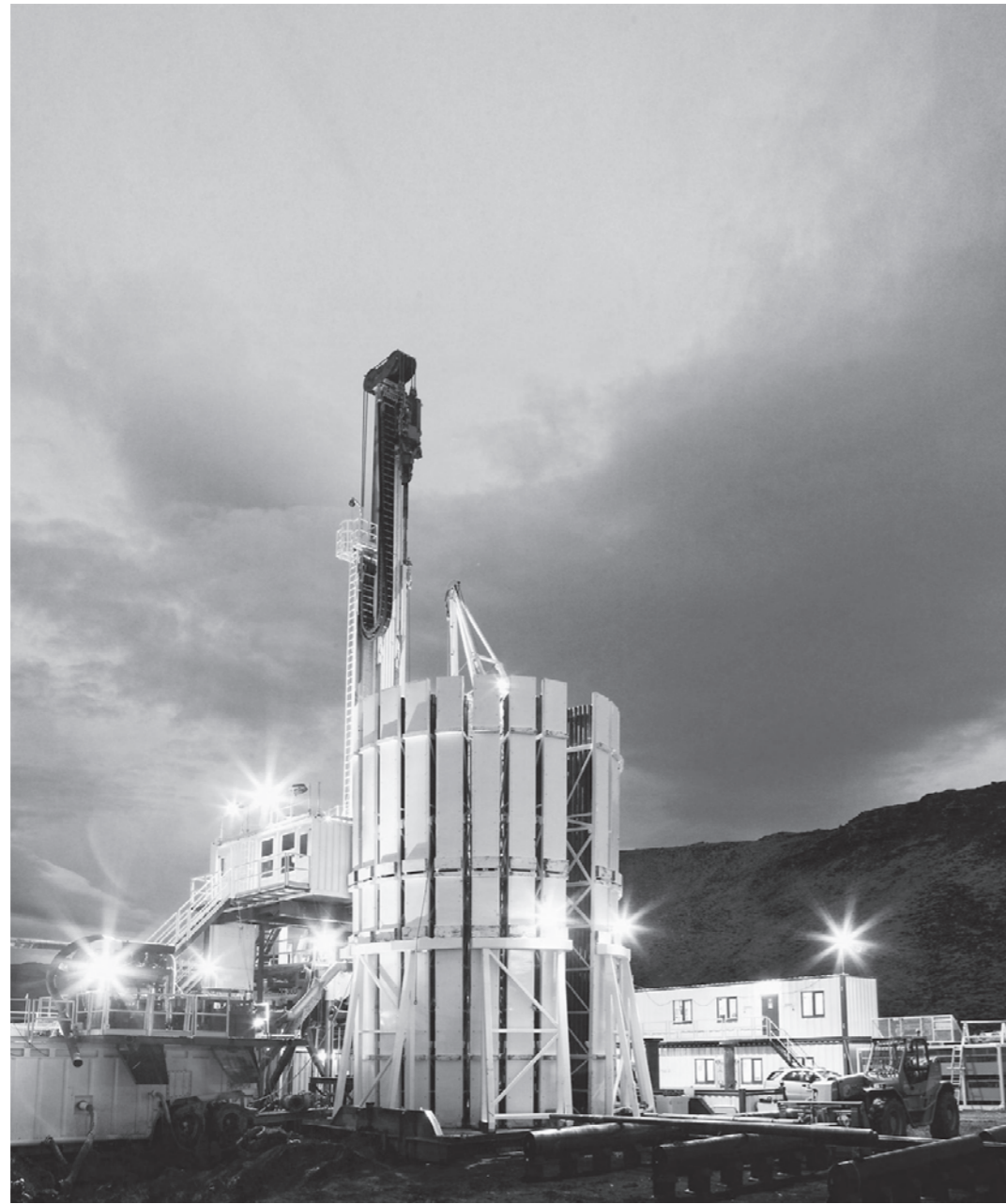
I personally experienced the monster 9.0-magnitude earthquake at the embassy and from that very beginning I decided to stay at my desk in Tokyo, no matter what, as we tried to formulate plans how Iceland could assist Japan in the rebuilding process, especially in the two main areas where Iceland has proven expertise.

In my mind, our two island countries are like identical twins born of the same mother. Our islands were given the same rare natural gifts but separated after birth by destiny to pursue each country's chosen path.

Those gifts are of course the immense geothermal resources in our volcanic countries and the second are the fisheries resources because we are surrounded by fertile fishing grounds made possible due to an interplay of warm and cold ocean currents off our islands.

The geothermal resource

During the past three years the Embassy of Iceland in Tokyo has devoted considerable time to promote the utilization of geothermal energy here in Japan, a volcanic country like Iceland. Geothermal energy is a clean, safe and renewable energy option. We have over 70 years of experience in this field and ours is the only country in the world where no fossil fuels are used to heat houses. In Iceland, we use the resource in a variety of ways; it is economi-



Renewable resource: The drilling rig Tyr is owned by Jarðboranir (Iceland Drilling Co.), one of the world's leading companies in drilling for geothermal energy. EMBASSY OF ICELAND

cally viable, cost efficient and environmentally friendly.

The highlight was the realization of our geothermal forum, which was held last November in Tokyo. The forum was organized by the Icelandic Embassy in Tokyo and supported by both governments and leading Japanese and Icelandic companies

in the energy sector. For more information, please see the website www.japanicelandgeothermal.com.

The utilization of the geothermal resource in Iceland is vital to our economy and we are certain that its utilization in Japan can also play a part in Japan's new energy policy.

New energy applications

Iceland takes an active role in trying to find new applications for the use of our natural resources. One company in Iceland has developed a method for recycling plastic materials, for example, fishing nets, plastic pipes, industrial and home plastics. The main material used in

this recycling is mainly geothermal hot water.

A company like this would be ideal for the worst-affected areas in northeast Japan that have access to geothermal water in the cleanup process and could provide valuable jobs in the future.

Icelanders are also in contact with Kinki University, a world leader in the research and education within fish farming and aquaculture. The aim of that cooperation is to utilize geothermal hot water in fish farming in the pristine Atlantic Ocean in the West Fjords to cultivate fish bound exclusively for Japanese consumers in Europe.

Nordic Green Japan

Iceland is a proud participant in the Nordic Green Japan conference held Nov. 7 to 8 in the National Museum of Science and Technology (Miraikan) in Tokyo, which will cover a broad spectrum of green technologies where Nordic companies have world-leading green innovations.

In addition to geothermal, we will have a presentation on the innovative idea of tidal energy production, by harnessing the tides on the west coast of Iceland. This can be realized by bridging narrow fjords and utilizing those structures for power generation. Tidal power is the most renewable power in the world and, if feasible, could also be the cheapest form of energy in the future.

Fisheries

The fisheries sector has for decades been the mainstay of the Icelandic economy. After difficult times of overfishing in Iceland the Marine Research Institute (MRI), a government institute under the Ministry of Fisheries, was established. The MRI conducts scientific research on each species in the Icelandic exclusive economic zone and sets a yearly limit, which is submitted to the government, which has the last word on the implementation of the MRI's recommendations. This information is

the cornerstone of the Icelandic Fisheries Management System. One of the most important tasks of the MRI is to provide the government with advice on the total allowable catch and what conservation measures should be taken.

Today the Icelandic fisheries sector is the best-managed fisheries sector in Europe because of our stringent quota system, which is based on the total allowable catch advice of each species given by the MRI.

In Japan, the fisheries sector is hurting especially in affected areas where thousands of fishing boats and hundreds of harbors were destroyed. Before March 11 the domestic fisheries sector was in a decline due to faltering domestic fish resources. According to various data, more than half of the fishery resources of the waters surrounding Japan are facing seriously low levels, depletion and in some cases collapse. The species at greatest risk include pollack, mackerel, squid and sardines.

The main difference between our systems is that instead of a central body like the Icelandic MRI, Japanese fisheries are con-



Good living: A port in southeast Iceland. The Icelandic fisheries sector does not receive any state subsidies. EMBASSY OF ICELAND

trolled by each of the 47 prefectures, not by a central scientific body. Instead, a fishery coordination committee, FCC, is established for each prefecture. As I understand the FCC is independent of the prefectural governments and it functions mainly for the fishermen.

The Icelandic Fisheries Management System, which is based on sustainable fisheries, could well be a benchmark in the rebuilding of this sector in Japan.

It should also be noted that the Icelandic fisheries sector is possibly the only fisheries sector in Europe that is not receiving

state subsidies because we believe that fishermen can make a good living off properly managed fisheries, based on science and sustainable management methods.

In conclusion I would like to point to a very poignant article by Rob Gilhooly in The Japan Times (June 10) that highlights the need to rebuild the Japanese fisheries sector from the bottom up. I would also like to praise The Japan Times for extremely important articles on energy and the environment here in Japan and timely editorials on those subjects.

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Icelandic National Day*

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