

SUNY panel discusses effects of crisis on Japan, world at large

By **JEREMIAH HORRIGAN**

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Five speakers from a variety of academic and professional disciplines examined and explained the disaster's impact from their particular perspectives, which ranged from the geological to the economic to the psychosocial.

Dylan McGee, assistant professor of Japanese, presented Japanese TV news reports whose impact needed neither translation nor explanation: a woman wearing a surgical mask, looking for her family as she struggled to walk across the shattered remnants of her neighborhood. A woman giving birth to a baby in a hospital where the staff refused to evacuate before she delivered.

McGee noted that a large part of what will continue to plague Japan is mundane but critical: elderly people without prescription drugs, mothers whose babies need diapers.

Shafiul Chowdhury, associate professor of geological sciences, assured the crowd that contrary to pronouncements by both the mayor of Tokyo and some political commentators, the earthquake was not the result of what the mayor called "moral degradation."

Motoharu Imai, a retired nuclear engineer, offered assurances that even a worst-case scenario at the country's damaged nuclear power plants poses a relatively mild threat to other parts of the world. He compared a possible meltdown in a reactor core as being

far less dangerous to other countries than when the U.S., Soviet Union, China and France conducted atmospheric hydrogen bomb tests in the early 1960s.

Laura Ebert, an associate economics professor, said that overall, Japan's slow emergence from a 15-year recession may actually be helped along by the need for an immense recovery operation that will generate jobs. She cautioned, however, that the global economy could be damaged because some industries might be unable to produce components for internationally produced products. The failure of one component manufacturer could have a domino effect on others, she said.

James Halpern, director of the college's Institute for Disaster Mental Health, said that despite Japan's "extremely strong culture of preparedness," the psychosocial trauma of the disaster — particularly to children — will be a burden the country will have to carry for generations.

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