

Japan will 'recover and rebuild'

Says PM Naoto Kan

AFP, Osaka

Prime Minister Naoto Kan yesterday vowed the nation would overcome its biggest post-war crisis and "once more rebuild" after being struck by a devastating earthquake and tsunami.

In a rallying cry to his disaster-hit nation Kan voiced confidence that the government could take "firm control" of the crisis at the crippled Fukushima nuclear power plant as Japan battles to avert a radioactive disaster.

"We will overcome this tragedy and recover," he said in a strident televised address. "We will once more rebuild Japan".

The centre-left leader, wearing an emergency services uniform, was speaking one week after the country's worst ever quake struck, wiping out swathes of coastal areas and knocking out key cooling systems on nuclear power plants.

Kan said Japan was still facing "huge difficulties" in tackling the problems at the plant, which has been hit by a series of explosions.

As workers faced massive danger in trying to avert a full meltdown, Kan said

that "although we cannot let our guard down, we will take firm control of the situation and we will be able to emerge from this situation."

Seeking to raise spirits, Kan reminded his people of the nation's post-war recovery.

"We are in a situation in which this crisis is truly testing us as a people," he said.

"While we have been called a small island country, we were able to miraculously rebuild after the war. With the power of the people, we will rebuild this country."

"Because of this quake and tsunami, we cannot falter at any cost. We will rebuild Japan again from scratch. We will face this crisis with determination."

Japan's nuclear safety agency yesterday raised the Fukushima crisis level to five from four on the international scale of gravity for atomic accidents, which goes to as high as seven.

The decision by the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) puts Fukushima on the same level as the 1979 accident at Three Mile Island in Pennsylvania and the worst ever in Japan.



PHOTO: AFP

A man stands on debris in Minamisanriku (left), a Japanese rescue worker holds an intravenous drip bag as an elderly survivor is transported to a hospital (top right) in Kesenuma in Miyagi prefecture and members of the Japanese community at the University of Hong Kong take part in a fundraising event (bottom right) for the victims one week after a massive earthquake and tsunami devastated northeastern Japan.

JAPAN DISASTER Death, missing toll tops 17,000

AFP, Tokyo

The number of people confirmed dead in the March 11 earthquake and tsunami in Japan has hit 6,911, surpassing the toll from the massive tremor in Kobe in 1995, police said yesterday.

The number of people unaccounted for rose slightly to 10,316, putting the combined total of dead and missing at 17,227, the National Police Agency said in its latest update. A total of 2,356 people were injured.

In January 1995, a 7.2-magnitude quake struck the western Japanese port city of Kobe, killing 6,434 people.

The March 11 quake is now Japan's deadliest natural disaster since the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake, which killed more than 142,000 people.

The toll from the disaster one week ago has increased steadily in recent days, and reports suggest it could eventually be much higher.

Earlier, the death toll was likely to hit 10,000, the mayor of a coastal town said.

Chernobyl's mental trauma is a lesson

AFP, Moscow

Japan risks harming the mental health of those affected by its quake-damaged nuclear plant if it repeats the error of the Soviet Union after the 1986 Chernobyl disaster in concealing information, psychologists warned.

The USSR notoriously kept the April 1986 explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear power station under wraps for several days and then failed to inform the "liquidators" sent in to limit the damage about the extent of the catastrophe.

The transparency failure left a legacy of mental as well as physical problems, a lesson that Japan must learn as it battles the risk of radiation at its Fukushima nuclear power plant, Russian and Ukrainian psychologists said.

"Insufficient information (on the risks after a nuclear accident) can generate tensions that destroy the health of people submitted to extreme conditions," said Valery Krasnov, director of a psychological institute in Moscow.

"The authorities must not hide information," said Krasnov, the author of a book entitled "Psychological Problems for Liquidators after the Chernobyl Catastrophe".

The USSR sent in tens of thousands of liquidators into Chernobyl in the immediate aftermath and subsequent months.

Observers have criticised Japan for giving incomplete and sometimes contradictory information about the true situation at Fukushima, amid fears the plant is at risk of a full nuclear meltdown.

"Japan is keeping information back just like we did at Chernobyl. It's 1986 all over again," Krasnov said, while acknowledging that this time "the situation is not of the same magnitude".

"The liquidators are still suffering psychological problems. These kind of consequences can be felt for years afterwards," he added.

Libyan intervention 'risky' Says Germany

AFP, Berlin

No German troops will take part in any military intervention in Libya as there are "considerable risks and dangers", Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle said yesterday, after Berlin abstained in a UN vote to impose a no-fly zone.

"We remain eminently sceptical on the option of military intervention... anticipated in this resolution. We see in it considerable risks and dangers. That is why we could not approve this part of the text," a statement said.

"German soldiers will not take part in a military intervention in Libya," he added.

The UN vote passed 10-0 with five abstentions in the 15-member council.

Permanent members China and Russia were among those abstaining, but did not use their veto power. India and Brazil also abstained.

'Hell' awaits anyone who attacks Libya Warns Gaddafi

AFP, Benghazi

Muammar Gaddafi warned yesterday that "hell" awaits anyone who attacks Libya, as Britain and France were expected to scramble fighter jets against his forces after securing the UN's blessing.

"If the world goes crazy, so will we," the defiant strongman said in remarks to Portuguese television just hours before the UN Security Council vote. "We will respond. We will turn their lives into hell."

Gaddafi said the Council had "no mandate" for such a resolution, "which we absolutely do not recognise."

"This is not a war between two countries that permits the council to intervene," he argued. The UN Charter "does not permit interference in the domestic affairs" of a country.

Following a warning on Thursday that any military operation against Libya would expose air and maritime traffic in the Mediterranean to danger, Gaddafi said such action would have "great consequences for the Mediterranean and for Europe."

"The Mediterranean will be ravaged. No air or sea traffic will be safe."

In The Hague, the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court warned the Libyan government that any indiscriminate attack on civilians in Benghazi would constitute "war crimes."

Immediately after the UN resolution was passed, Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Kaaim said Libya was ready for a ceasefire but wanted to discuss its terms.

Gaddafi, in broadcast just hours before the vote, had warned his forces would attack Benghazi on Thursday night and show "no mercy."

Saudi king orders more handouts, security boost

REUTERS, Riyadh

Saudi King Abdullah announced yesterday billions of dollars in handouts for his people and boosted his security apparatus in a renewed effort to shield the country from unrest rocking the Arab world.

In a rare televised address to the nation, the aging king made a brief statement congratulating Saudis for their loyalty.

Amongst a wave of new spending, the decrees outlined a boost in welfare benefits, bonuses for public sector workers, including the army, and a massive drive to build new housing.

The king also ordered the creation of 60,000 security jobs within the interior ministry.

Messenger probe enters Mercury orbit

BBC ONLINE

Nasa's Messenger spacecraft has successfully entered into orbit around the planet Mercury - the first probe to do so.

The robotic explorer initiated a 14-minute burn on its main thruster at 0045 GMT yesterday.

This slowed the spacecraft sufficiently to be captured by the innermost planet's gravity.

Being so close to the Sun, Mercury is a hostile place to do science. Surface temperatures would melt lead.

In this blistering environment, the probe has to carry a shield to protect it from the full glare of our star.

And even its instruments looking down at the planet have to be guarded against the intense heat coming back up off the surface.

"It was right on the money," Messenger's chief engineer, Eric Finnegan, said. "This is as close as you can possibly get to being perfect."

"Everybody was whooping and hollering; we are elated. There's a lot of work left to be done, but we are there."

The spacecraft is now some 46 million km from the Sun, and about 155 million km from Earth.

The orbit insertion burn by the probe's 600-newton engine will have parked it into a 12-hour, highly elliptical orbit about the planet.

Asylum seekers protest in Australia

AFP, Sydney

Protests by angry asylum seekers escalated at an Australian detention centre with rioters setting fire to buildings and police responding with tear gas and bean-bag bullets, officials said yesterday.

A group of around 250-300 detainees on Christmas Island ran amok, hurling bricks and lighting fires late Thursday and forcing the Australian Federal Police to intervene, the Department of Immigration said.

The latest violence followed days of unrest at the facility, which houses some 1,800 boat people awaiting the lengthy processing of their applications to stay in the country.

Yemen forces open fire on protesters, kill 32

AFP, Sanaa

Regime loyalists raked pro-democracy protesters with bullets in Yemen's capital yesterday, killing at least 32 people in the bloodiest clash in nearly a month of protests, medics and witnesses said.

According to witnesses, pro-Saleh "thugs" opened fire on protesters killing at least 32 and wounding more than 200 wounded, taking the reported death toll past 70 since the demonstrations against President Ali Abdullah Saleh began.

An AFP correspondent said the shooting began from rooftops around a square at Sanaa University after demonstrators attempted to dismantle a barricade.

Thousands of people have camped out in the square since February 21, demanding the departure of Saleh, an autocratic US ally in the war against Al-Qaeda who has been in power since 1978.

Dozens of people have also been wounded in clashes around the country since March 10, when Saleh promised to protect protesters from violence and offered to hold a referendum on a new constitution which would devolve power to parliament.

The United States, which sees Saleh as a pillar of stability in a fragile nation, welcomed the gesture, but Yemen's parliamentary opposition says the president has lost all credibility and must resign this year.

Heavy arms fire kills at least 25 in I Coast

AFP, Abidjan

Heavy arms fire rang out early yesterday in a stronghold of internationally recognised Ivory Coast president Alassane Ouattara in Abidjan where an earlier attack left up to 30 dead.

"Yesterday (Thursday) at around midnight we heard shooting from heavy weapons. We got under the bed, on the floor, out of fear of being killed," said one resident of the city's most populated suburb.

Several witnesses confirmed the shooting, but there were no immediate reports of casualties.

On Thursday the UN mission in Ivory Coast reported between 25 and 30 people were killed in an attack with missiles by armed forces loyal to outgoing president Laurent Gbagbo, in one of the bloodiest days since the start of a crisis following disputed elections in November 2010.

The missile attacks may constitute crimes against humanity, a spokesman for the UN human rights chief said in Geneva yesterday.

Thousands of Bahraini Shiites protest

AFP, Diraz

Several thousand Bahraini Shiites protested in the town of Diraz following Friday prayers, chanting anti-regime slogans, despite a government ban on demonstrations.

The crowd chanted "Allahu akbar" (God is greatest), and "we will not be humiliated!"

At least eight people have been killed during a crackdown by Bahraini security forces on a pro-democracy protest movement that began in the tiny Gulf kingdom on February 14.



PHOTO: AFP

Yemeni anti-government protesters react as they carry away a wounded demonstrator in Sanaa yesterday as more than 30 anti-regime protesters were shot dead and over 100 wounded.

NEWS IN brief

Military action if Iran sanctions fail: Netanyahu

REUTERS, Washington

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the world must make clear that Iran would face "credible military action" if sanctions do not shut down Tehran's disputed nuclear program.

Netanyahu, in an interview on CNN, said it was clear Iran was pursuing its nuclear ambitions despite international sanctions and was getting a lot closer to obtaining nuclear arms.

"They have enriched enough material now almost for three nuclear bombs," he said. "They still have to re-enrich it again but that is what they are doing."

Japan nuclear crisis a 'race against time': IAEA

AFP, Osaka

UN International Atomic Energy Agency chief Yukiya Amano said yesterday that Japan's battle to stabilise a crippled nuclear plant was "a race against time".

"This is a very grave and serious accident," he said after meeting Prime Minister Naoto Kan, referring to the stricken Fukushima plant.

"So it is important that the international community, including the IAEA, handles this jointly. Especially cooling (the reactors) is extremely impor-

Moon will be closest to earth on March 19

THE TIMES OF INDIA, Chennai

A full moon comes once a month. But March 19 is the day of the fullest moon -- when the moon will make its closest approach to the earth in almost 20 years.

Amidst fears that the tidal periodicity of the moon caused the Japanese earthquake and tsunami, scientists assure that it would be quite safe to enjoy a moonlit walk that evening.

"Unless the supermoon were a supernatural phenomenon it wouldn't cause upheavals to be afraid of," they say.

Scientists at the Tamil Nadu Science and Technology Centre say that they have been receiving several calls everyday asking whether the moon is responsible for wreaking havoc in the world.

US lawmakers reject call for Afghan withdrawal

AFP, Washington

The US House of Representatives on Thursday rejected a resolution calling for the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan, a war that is facing growing public opposition.

The proposal was defeated by a vote of 321-93, but it showed increased opposition compared with March 2010 when a similar bill was defeated by 356-65.

The vote came days after a Washington Post/ABC News poll showed 64 percent of Americans feel the US war in Afghanistan is no longer worth fighting. That was a sharp rise from April 2010, when 52 per-

Japanese royals to miss British prince's wedding

AFP, Osaka

Japan's Crown Prince Naruhito and Crown Princess Masako will not attend the wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton because of the earthquake and tsunami, a report said yesterday.

An official of the Japanese Imperial Household Agency said the British royal household had been informed of the decision.

Because Japan's Imperial couple were unable to attend the April 29 ceremony, arrangements were being made for the prince and princess to travel to