

Radiation fears mount again in Japan as toll tops 10,000

Situation still 'unpredictable': PM

SENDAI, Japan

The operator of a disaster-struck Japanese nuclear plant yesterday reported possible damage to a reactor vessel -- casting a new shadow over efforts to control a steady radiation leak.

Two weeks after a giant quake struck and sent a massive tsunami crashing into the Pacific coast, the death toll from Japan's worst post-war disaster topped 10,000 and there was scant hope for 17,500 others still missing.

The tsunami obliterated entire towns and some 250,000 homeless in almost 2,000 shelters are still braving privations and a winter chill, with a degree of discipline and dignity that has impressed the world.

In a televised news conference a fortnight after the calamity, Prime Minister Naoto Kan urged people living in tsunami-stricken areas to "move with full courage towards reconstruction."

The focus of Japan's immediate fears remained the Fukushima nuclear plant, which was still emitting radioac-

tive vapour.

Kan said that the situation at the ageing facility, located 250 kilometres (155 miles) northeast of Tokyo, was still "very unpredictable".

"We're working to stop the situation from worsening. We need to continue to be extremely vigilant," he cautioned.

The government asked people still living between 20 and 30 kilometres from the plant to leave voluntarily, effectively widening the exclusion zone.

China, South Korea and the EU joined the United States, Russia and several other nations in restricting food imports from Japan, which itself has ordered a stop to vegetable and dairy shipments from the region near the atomic plant.

Tokyo Electric Power Co., which operates the plant, said it may take at least another month to achieve a cold shutdown -- when reactor temperatures fall below boiling point and cooling systems are back at atmospheric pressure.

A day after two workers at the 1970s-era facility were hospitalised with radiation burns, its operator reported sus-

pected damage at reactor number three.

"It is possible that the pressure vessel containing the fuel rods in the reactor is damaged," a TEPCO spokesman told AFP.

The new safety scare could hamper urgent efforts to restore power to the all-important cooling systems at the plant.

"Radioactive substances have leaked to places far from the reactor," said a spokesman for Japan's nuclear safety agency, Hideyuki Nishiyama.

"As far as the data show, we believe there is a certain level of containment ability but it's highly possible that the reactor is damaged."

The reactor is a particular concern because it is the only one of six at the plant to use a potentially volatile mix of uranium and plutonium.

Higher radioactivity has also been detected in the ocean near the Fukushima plant on Japan's Pacific coast, raising public fears about the safety of fish and seaweed, which are traditional staples in the island nation's diet.



Two US Air Force F16 sits on the tarmac as a C17 takes off at the Aviano air base yesterday.

PHOTO : AFP

NEWS IN brief

EU urges UN action to block Gaddafi access to oil revenues

AFP, Brussels

EU leaders urged the world community Thursday to tighten the noose on Muammar Gaddafi by ensuring Libya's oil and gas revenues "do not reach" his regime.

In a statement issued at a European Union summit, leaders of the 27-nation bloc said they stood "ready to initiate and adopt further sanctions, including measures to ensure that oil and gas revenues do not reach the Gaddafi regime."

"Member states will take similar proposals to the United Nations Security Council," the statement

Al-Qaeda snatched missiles in Libya: Chad president

AFP, Paris

Al-Qaeda's offshoot in North Africa has snatched surface-to-air missiles from an arsenal in Libya during the civil strife there, Chad's president said in an interview to be published Monday.

Idriss Deby Itno did not say how many were stolen, but told the African weekly Jeune Afrique that he was "100 percent sure" of his assertion.

"The Islamists of Al Qaeda took advantage of the pillaging of arsenals in the rebel zone to acquire arms, including surface-to-air missiles, which were then smuggled into their sanctuaries in Tenere," a desert region of the Sahara that stretches from northeast

Tibet exile govt accepts Dalai Lama retirement

AFP, Dharamshala

Tibetan parliament-in-exile agreed yesterday to accept the Dalai Lama's resignation from politics, paving the way for a new leadership structure within the movement.

The Dalai Lama will continue to lead the Tibetan cause in his more important role as its spiritual figurehead, but two weeks ago he announced he wanted to step down as head of Tibet's government-in-exile.

"It was a hard decision to decide to amend the constitution and separate His Holiness from Tibetan politics but he is doing it for the benefit of Tibetans in the long run," Karma Yeshe, a member of parliament,

China activist jailed for 10 years amid crackdown

AFP, Beijing

A prominent Chinese democracy activist was sentenced yesterday to 10 years in jail for subversion, his wife said, amid a severe crackdown on dissidents in the wake of the Arab "Jasmine" protests.

A court in the southwestern province of Sichuan jailed Liu Xianbin, 43, for "inciting subversion of state power" after he published pro-democracy articles online, his wife Chen Mingxian told AFP. He was detained last June.

"The public prosecution authorities believe that these articles slander and vilify the Chinese Communist Party and incite people to overthrow

Gates first US defence chief to visit Palestine

REUTERS, Ramallah

Robert Gates yesterday became the first US Defence Secretary to visit the West Bank, meeting Palestinian leaders keenly aware of every little nod to their hopes of achieving statehood.

Children in Ramallah stared as the long motorcade of US cars wound through the streets of the city north of Jerusalem.

With US diplomacy fully stretched over revolts in the Arab world and the air war with Libya, Gates was looking to revive stalled peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians, before another war fills the

France urges 'political' coordination in Libya

Hillary urges Arab support

AFP, Brussels

French President Nicolas Sarkozy on Thursday said coordination of the international campaign in Libya must "remain eminently political" even if Nato takes military command of operations.

"Operational, technical coordination will be at Nato level, but political coordination... will be at the level of the coalition" launched by the United States, Britain and France, he said at a European Union summit.

"Everyone must understand that coordination must remain eminently political even if it rests on Nato machinery," Sarkozy said at a briefing closing a first day of talks at the two-day summit.

That would enable non-Nato members, such as Arab partners, to take part in political decision-making, he said.

Citing Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, which have pledged aircraft to support the Libya campaign, he said: "They will have to participate in the coalition's political coordination."

Meanwhile, Sarkozy yesterday said France and Britain were readying a "politi-

cal and diplomatic" solution on Libya.

Referring to talks in London next Tuesday, Sarkozy said "there will certainly be a Franco-British initiative to clearly show the solution is not only military but also political and diplomatic."

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton underscored "crucial" Arab support Thursday for the allied military effort in Libya, hailing Qatar and the United Arab Emirates for joining the coalition.

"We have always said that Arab leadership and participation is crucial," Clinton said, describing an Arab League statement of support for military intervention last week as a "pivotal" moment in the process.

"We are deeply appreciative of their continuing contributions including aircrafts and pilots from Qatar," Clinton said.

"This evening, the United Arab Emirates announced they are joining the coalition and sending planes to help protect Libyan civilians and enforce the no-fly zone. We welcome this important step," she said.

Sarkozy said the six-day military campaign had prevented "thousands and thousands" of deaths.

Yemen's Saleh offers handover to 'safe hands'

AFP, Sanaa

President Ali Abdullah Saleh pledged to hand over power but only to "safe hands," in a defiant speech to massed supporters yesterday, after talks with a top defector failed to defuse Yemen's crisis.

"We will stand firm with you... steadfast in the face of all challenges," Saleh, wearing a suit and sunglasses and confidently waving his right hand, told vast crowds in the Yemeni capital.

"We don't need power. We need to hand it over to safe hands, and not to corrupt and hateful hands... You are the ones who will be handed power," he said, triggering massive applause.

IVORY COAST CRISIS UN rights council sets up probe into violence

AFP, Geneva

The UN Human Rights Council yesterday set up an international probe into growing violence in Ivory Coast amid fears about serious abuse and inflammatory rhetoric in the country's post election crisis.

The 47-member council approved a resolution proposed by Nigeria on behalf of African countries recognising the election of Alassane Ouattara as president, condemning "atrocities" and expressing concern about "the seriousness and extent" of abuse.

It "decides to dispatch an independent international commission of inquiry... to investigate the facts and circumstances surrounding the allegations of serious abuses and violations of human rights committed in Ivory Coast following the presidential election of 28 November 2010," according to the text.

The resolution was endorsed without a vote, signalling unanimous support.

Ivory Coast has been locked in a violent stand-off since the election, with former president Laurent Gbagbo refusing to give up office even though Ouattara has been recognised as the winner of the polls by the international community.

The inquiry is aimed at identifying "those responsible for such acts and bring them to justice".

Avoid civilian casualties in Libya

Medvedev tells Obama

AFP, Moscow

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev has urged US counterpart Barack Obama to avoid civilian casualties in Libya and limit the international campaign to the goals set by the United Nations.

Obama thanked Medvedev for "positive statements" about the mandate of a UN resolution implementing a no-fly zone, but his statement did not mention the issue of civilian casualties.

The Kremlin said Medvedev called Obama on Thursday to discuss the Libyan crisis amid Russian worries that the air offensive could soon spill over into a ground campaign specifically aimed at removing strongman Moamer Kadhafi from power.

Russia abstained from last week's UN Security Council resolution authorising a no-fly zone over Libya.

African nations discuss Libya conflict

AFP, Addis Ababa

A high-level delegation sent by embattled Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi joined African Union talks on the Libya crisis here yesterday which also included EU, UN and Arab League representatives.

The five-member team from Tripoli turned up for the talks following an invitation from AU Commission Chairman Jean Ping, but an invitation to the Libyan opposition to attend had not been taken up by early afternoon.

"The aim is to foster an exchange of views in order to take action on the situation in Libya and to seek the ways and means towards a swift solution to the crisis," Ping said at the start of the meeting.

"The situation in Libya is extremely serious, both for Libya itself and for the region as a whole," Ping said, before the meeting was closed to the press.

Ping returned early yesterday from Europe after meeting with French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe and an envoy sent by the European Union's chief diplomat Catherine Ashton.

Gaddafi's delegation is headed by Mohammed al-Zwai, the secretary general of the General People's Congress.

Yesterday's gathering follows a meeting of a high-level AU ad-hoc committee on Libya in the Mauritanian capital last week.

Ping said an ad-hoc committee has come up with "a roadmap that is both realistic and adequate and which recommends what needs to be done to foster a swift solution to the crisis."

The AU is opposed to the "foreign military intervention" and has on several occasions called on the Libyan parties to come to the negotiating table.

Military deployed as protests spread in Syria

AFP, Daraa

Protests demanding major reforms in Syria spread yesterday from the southern city of Daraa to Damascus, hours after the government announced a string of major reforms including the possibility of ending emergency rule that has been in place since 1963.

Chanting "Daraa is Syria" and "We will sacrifice ourselves for Syria," hundreds of people marched from Omayyad mosque in the centre of Damascus' Old City along Souk Al-Hamadiyah street before police moved in.

A total of 17 people were killed yesterday when a demonstration headed to the Syrian protest city of Daraa was raked by gunfire, a human rights activist said.

The news could not be confirmed by independent sources or hospitals in the area.

The Daraa-based activist said security forces on Friday also opened fire on protesters who gathered near the home in Daraa of the town governor, who was fired from the post earlier this week.

Activists have accused security forces of killing more than 100 people on Wednesday alone in the town, which is home to some 75,000 people.

Journalists yesterday were asked to leave Daraa, a tribal town near the Syrian-Jordanian border, shortly before the funerals of two people killed in a shooting on protesters earlier this week.

Supporters of President Bashar al-Assad shouted back: "God, Syria and Bashar, that's all" as convoys in support of Assad took to the streets.

The call for protests came despite announcements that President Assad had ordered the release of all activists detained this month and the ruling Baath party had agreed to a string of reforms including studying the lifting of emergency laws in force since 1963.

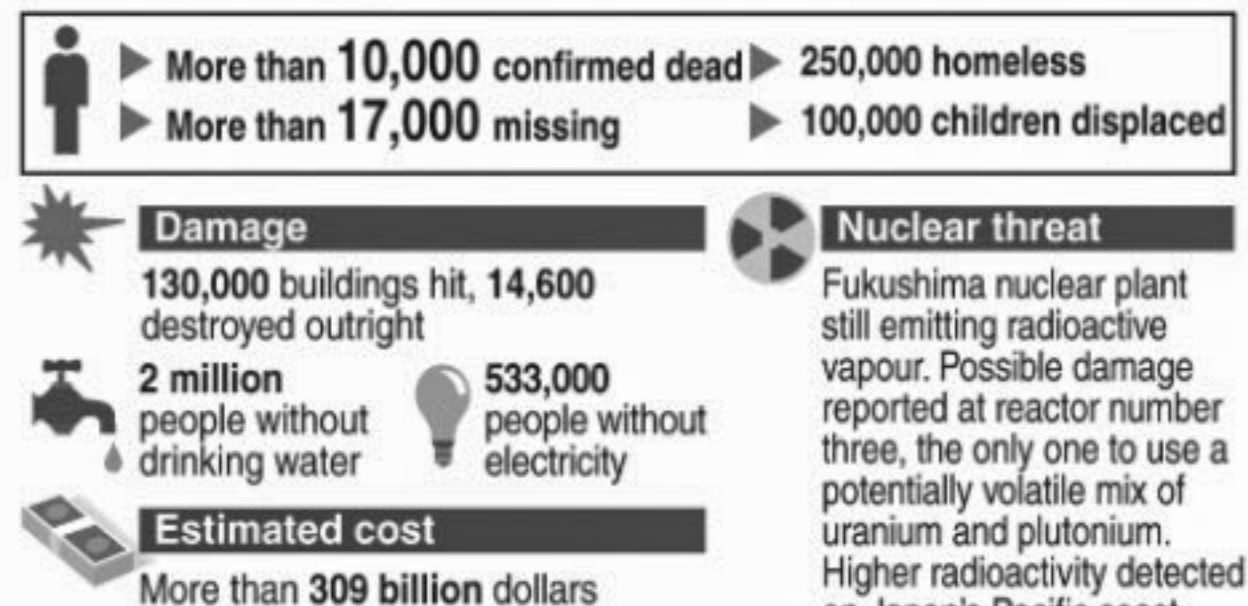
The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights confirmed the release of all detainees arrested in Daraa, a tribal city that has emerged as the hub of the protests.

Japan quake aftermath

Survivors in Onagawa, Miyagi prefecture



Situation as of 25 March, 1300 GMT



Source: Japanese government, Tepco, UN, Save the Children

AFP

Scores hurt in fresh Jordan clashes

AFP, Amman

More than 100 people were injured yesterday as pro-reform protesters and government supporters clashed in Amman, prompting police to use water cannons to disperse them.

Anti-riot police also broke up a protest camp for students and arrested several of them, a security official told AFP.

"There are more than 100 people injured, including policemen. Two of the injured are in critical condition," a medical source said.

The clashes erupted after around 200 govt supporters hurled stones at more than 2,000 young demonstrators.

baydevelopments.com

মহান স্বাধীনতা দিবস ২০১১

ফাঁসির মঞ্চে গেয়ে গেল যারা
জীবনের জয়গান, আসি অলক্ষ্যে দাঁড়ায়েছে তারা,
দিবে কোন বলিদান আজি পরীক্ষা,
জাতির অথবা জাতের করিবে আণ ?
দুলিতেছে তরী, ফুলিতেছে জল,
কান্ডারী হুশিয়ার !

The Art of Life