

Japan nuclear crisis to be over in 9 months: Tepco

Hillary Clinton vows full support for disaster-hit Japan

REUTERS, Tokyo

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton urged Japan yesterday to remain active on the world stage and pledged support for Washington's key ally in East Asia as the operator of a stricken nuclear plant finally set out a timeline to shut it down.

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (Tepco) said it hoped to achieve a cold shutdown of the plant that was crippled in the March 11 quake and tsunami -- effectively making the reactors safe and stable -- within six to nine months.

"Economically, diplomatically and in so many other ways, Japan is indispensable to global problem-solving," Clinton told a news conference after talks with Japanese Foreign Minister Takeaki Matsumoto. "And the US-Japan alliance is as indispensable as ever to global security and progress."

Clinton also said Japan and the United States had agreed to create a "public-private partnership for reconstruction" under the guidance of Japan's government, and that US firms

and organisations would begin discussing how they can support Japan as it comes through the crisis.

Soon after she spoke, Tepco gave a briefing outlining its plan to bring the plant to cold shutdown.

Even if the operator does manage to do that within six to nine months, Japan hinted yesterday that a full recovery was likely to take longer.

"The first juncture toward safety would be when the fuel rods are fully submerged in water and a cold shutdown is achieved," said Banri Kaieda, Japan's economics minister.

"But true safety will not come until the fuel rods are removed from the reactors," Kaieda told a news conference yesterday.

Kaieda also said he advised Tepco not to dump contaminated water, no matter how low the radiation level, into the ocean in future.

The operator's decision earlier this month to pump water contaminated with low levels of radiation had raised the ire of Japan's neighbors China and

South Korea.

Clinton arrived in Japan, which is still reeling from the triple disaster nearly five weeks later, on the final leg of a global trek that took her to Berlin for Nato talks on the Libya conflict and to Seoul to tackle the North Korean nuclear stand-off and boost trade talks with another key ally in Asia.

The still rising death toll from the quake and tsunami has topped 13,000. The natural disaster and the nuclear crisis that followed have seriously rattled the world's third-largest economy.

Damages from the quake and tsunami have been estimated at \$300 billion, making it the world's costliest natural disaster.

Washington has deployed thousands of troops plus military aircraft and navy ships to help with relief work in the devastated northeastern part of the island nation.

Clinton, during her 5-hour stop, said there was no reason for Americans to stay away from Japan, other than the area around the nuclear plant.



DANCING IN THE VALLEY OF DEATH: Japanese traditional performers wearing devil masks dance for the 'Hanami' or 'flower viewing' at a temple in the tsunami devastated area in Rikuzentakata city, Iwate prefecture yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

US seeking safe haven for Gaddafi

AFP, Washington

The Barack Obama administration has launched an intense search for a country that could provide refuge to Libyan strongman Muammar Gaddafi, The New York Times reported Saturday.

But amid looming indictments against Gaddafi by the International Criminal Court in the Hague for the atrocities committed against his own people, US officials only have a narrow list of potential host countries.

That approach raises the prospect that Gaddafi could find haven in another country in Africa where about half of the countries have not signed the treaty.

The United States is also not a signatory due to worries that is military officers and intelligence officers could be prosecuted.

Gbagbo camp appeals to end I Coast unrest

Relatives of the former president freed

AFP, Abidjan

Former Ivory Coast strongman Laurent Gbagbo's political party called on his supporters Saturday to "end the war" and "the escalation of violence" in the country following his arrest.

"In many places, some of our compatriots are still fighting," said Pascal Affi N'Guessan, the leader of Gbagbo's Ivorian Popular Front (FPI), standing alongside former foreign minister Alcide Djedje.

"We must stop the escalation of violence," he said in a statement at a hotel where he and other former members of Gbagbo's regime have taken refuge.

"In the name of peace, let us end the war. Let us put an end to all forms of belligerence and confrontation," he said. "We must give our country the chance for restoration and reconstruction."

Of the 120-some people arrested with Gbagbo on Monday, 30 members of his family, including his grandchildren, were released and taken to "a destination we are keeping confidential", Ouattara's justice

minister, Jeannot Ahoussou Kouadio, said on the new government's TCI television.

Another 38 people arrested, mainly house staff including cooks and gardeners, were also released and "each has gone home", he said.

At the same time the Ouattara administration struggled to get the country moving again with civil servants who had stayed home during the fierce fighting between the forces of the rival leaders ordered to return to work on Monday.

Also classes are expected to resume in Ivorian schools on April 26, TCI reported.

But Ouattara is not getting unanimous support from his African neighbours with Gambia still backing Gbagbo and opposed to the use of foreign forces.

In Paris some 2,200 people gathered opposite the Eiffel tower for a pro-Ouattara rally, chanting thanks to French President Nicolas Sarkozy and the United Nations for their help in bringing change to Ivory Coast.

Across town at the Bastille, a counter-demonstration in support of Gbagbo drew several dozen people, an AFP correspondent reported.

Egypt ex-PM to face trial on corruption

AFP, Cairo

Former Egyptian prime minister Ahmed Nazif and the former ministers of interior and finance are to face trial on charges of corruption, a judicial source told AFP yesterday.

"The former prime minister Ahmed Nazif, former interior minister Habib al-Adly and former finance minister Yusef Boutros-Ghali will face trial, charged with misusing public funds and unlawful gains valued at 92 million Egyptian pounds," (15 million dollars), the source said.

The three, along with a German businessman, are accused of illegal profiteering from a deal to import new vehicle number plates.

They allegedly bought the number plates directly without calling for a public tender as laid down by law.

BEHIND A UNITED FRONT Nato meeting deepens cracks in the alliance

TIME.COM

While Nato foreign ministers ended their meeting in Berlin on Friday with a show of unity in the military campaign against Libya, the two-day summit had exposed further cracks in the alliance and now questions are being asked about whether Nato's air strikes are being ramped up from protecting civilians to all-out regime change.

Russia, which isn't involved in the campaign, is particularly wary of any signs of mission creep and reiterated its calls for a political solution to the Libyan conflict.

"The UN has not authorised regime change," Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said pointedly, warning the alliance not to use excessive force.

But Nato's Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, was quick to hit back. Rasmussen insisted that Nato's forces were acting "in strict conformity with both the spirit and the letter of the UN Security Council motion," which authorised a no-fly zone and gave member states the green light to "take all necessary measures" to protect civilians.

In a joint article published on Friday in The Times of London, France's Le Figaro and The Washington Post, President Obama, French President Sarkozy and British Prime Minister Cameron pledged that Nato would protect civilians: "So long as Gaddafi is in power, Nato must maintain its operations so that civilians remain protected and the pressure on the regime builds." The three leaders bluntly said a future for Libya with Gaddafi in power was "impossible."

Fourteen of Nato's 28 members are taking part in the mission, and only six are involved in direct air strikes. With the US keen to scale back its military effort in Libya, Britain and

France have put pressure on other member states to "step up to the plate."

Nato Secretary General Rasmussen told reporters on Friday that he was confident that other countries would provide more ground attack aircraft for precision bombing raids.

In Rome, Silvio Berlusconi's government rebuffed French and British requests to take part in bombing missions over Libya.

Some analysts say the divisions in the alliance have been exaggerated.

"While the legitimacy of this humanitarian intervention is unchallenged, many important questions about its feasibility remain these are healthy disagreements," says Constanze Stelzenmüller, a Senior Transatlantic Fellow at the German Marshall Fund of the United States in Berlin. "It's also important to note that the coalition and then Nato acted despite these disagreements and did so much faster than in previous cases."

Meanwhile, Germany has come under fire for abstaining on the UN's March 17 vote to enforce a no-fly zone over Libya. Germany's abstention has strained bilateral relations between Paris and Berlin.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said on Friday that the Libyan campaign had prevented a massacre like the one in the Bosnian city of Srebrenica, when in 1995 Bosnian Serb forces killed more than 7,000 Muslims. "The world did not wait for another Srebrenica in a place called Benghazi," Clinton said.

However, Clinton also warned that "we all need to be a bit patient," acknowledging that the military campaign will take time to achieve its goals. With the shadow of the war in Afghanistan looming, the alliance can only hope that it's not in for another long, drawn-out conflict.

NEWS IN brief

Palestinian president out Israeli troops in future state

AFP, Ramallah

The Palestinian Authority will "collapse" if Israel insists on stationing troops inside any future Palestinian state, Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas has told AFP.

Abbas, in an interview, said he would not allow any Israeli troops to be deployed in a future Palestinian state, despite Israel's insistence that it be able to maintain a military presence along the West Bank's border with Jordan.

Israel says it would need such a security presence for around 40 years to ensure the border between any

Israel arrests Palestinians over settler murders

AFP, Awarta

Israel has arrested two Palestinian suspects in connection with the grisly murder of a young settler family, Israeli security officials said yesterday.

A senior army officer said he believed the killing of the Israeli couple and three of their children in the West Bank settlement of Itamar was not ordered by a militant group but was the outcome of a burglary that went wrong.

Both the suspects' family and their home village of Awarta have traditional allegiances to the Marxist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, but Aloni said he did not believe the young men were directed by

More evacuated amid Philippine volcano fears

AFP, Manila

Philippine authorities said yesterday more people had been evacuated from towns and villages near a volcano island close to the capital amid increasing signs of seismic activity.

The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council said the number evacuated had increased to 1,375 as of Saturday from four towns near Taal volcano, while seismologists recorded 10 volcanic earthquakes overnight.

Water temperatures and gas emissions also

45 dead as tornadoes rip across US

AFP, Washington

At least 45 people were dead after a powerful storm whipped up tornadoes in seven southern US states, media reported yesterday.

The tornadoes left a trail of destruction in North Carolina Saturday, leveling homes and businesses and knocking out power, the NBC television network reported.

The fast-moving storm toppled trees and power lines, tore roofs off houses and scattered tractor-trailers across highways.

Some two dozen tornadoes were reported in the southern states of Mississippi and Alabama on Friday, a day after 15 twisters struck in Oklahoma, Kansas and Texas, the National Weather Service said.

Violent weather also hit Arkansas and Georgia on Friday, US news reports said.

Particularly hard-hit was the North Carolina capital city of Raleigh, where dozens of homes destroyed. Officials also reported multiple fatalities and widespread power outages throughout much of the state.

The violent weather system began late Thursday in Oklahoma, and left a trail of death and destruction as it traveled Friday and Saturday through several states.

Among seven people killed in Alabama were mother and her two children, who were sheltering inside their double-wide trailer when it was ripped from its foundation and thrown about 500 feet, landing on its roof, disaster officials said.

Nine killed in Indonesia landslide

AFP, Klamong

Nine people were killed and another seven injured yesterday in a landslide in Indonesia's East Java province, police said.

The men were taking a lunch break when a steep part of the hill collapsed on them, district police chief Rinto Djatmono told AFP.

"Nine men were killed after they were buried under the landslide and rocks. Seven others were injured and taken to the hospital," Djatmono said.

Landslides and floods are common in Indonesia during the rainy season, which hits a peak from December to February.

Jonathan ahead in Nigeria polls

REUTERS, Abuja

Nigeria President Goodluck Jonathan took a very strong lead yesterday as votes were tallied from around the nation, although his main rival Muhammadu Buhari did well across the mainly-Muslim north.

Results from 18 states including the capital Abuja and commercial hub Lagos put pre-poll favorite Jonathan at over 14 million votes with Buhari on 6 million. Jonathan did particularly well in his largely-Christian south.

Results still had to come in from some of Buhari's strongholds, but his chances of closing the gap on Jonathan were diminishing in a poll described by observers as the fairest in decades in Africa's most populous nation.

Weight loss boosts brain power

TIME.COM

Losing weight comes with a host of health benefits including making your brain sharper.

Yes, it turns out that in addition to being bad for your heart, carrying excess weight may impair cognitive functions such as memory and attention. Losing weight, therefore, may help improve these mental functions, according to new research led by John Gunstad, assistant professor of psychology at Kent State University.

For their study, they measured memory and attention in a group of 150 overweight participants. All of the volunteers completed mental-skills tests to assess their baseline abilities of recall and attention at the beginning of the study, and again 12 weeks later, after some of them had the operation and lost weight.

To begin with, about 24% of the patients showed impaired learning and 23% showed signs of poor memory recall when tested. By the end of the study, those who had lost weight had boosted their scores into the average or above average range for cognitive functions. Scores for the volunteers who didn't undergo weight-loss surgery dropped even further.



Libyan civilians flee the town of Ajdabiya to a safer place after Libyan government forces pounded rebels west of Ajdabiya with heavy artillery yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

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