

# High levels of radiation detected at Japan reactors

BBC ONLINE

Remote-controlled robots are being used at the quake-hit Fukushima nuclear plant to measure radiation levels.

The readings from two reactor buildings showed a "harsh environment" for humans to work in, complicating efforts to stabilise the damaged reactors.

It comes a day after the plant operator said it expected to bring the crisis under control by the end of the year.

Engineers are still struggling to bring the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant under control after vital cooling systems were knocked out by the tsunami.

Emergency workers have been unable to enter any reactor building since the disaster.

Elevated levels of radiation were measured by robots inside the buildings housing reactors No 1 and 3 on Sunday.

The plant's operator Tokyo Electric Power Co (Tepco) said exposure to radiation levels in the No 3 reactor for

four-and-a-half hours would exceed the emergency safety limit for power plant workers.

Oxygen densities in both buildings were about 21%, high enough for workers to enter the buildings, the firm said.

"It's a harsh environment for humans to work inside," said Hidehiko Nishiyama of Japan's Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (Nisa).

Tepco is planning to send robots to take measurements inside the No 2 reactor later yesterday.

Tepco spokesman Takeshi Makigami said: "What robots can do is limited, so eventually, people must enter the buildings."

The plant operator said it hoped to reduce radiation leaks in three months and to cool the reactors within nine months.

Top government spokesman Yukio Edano acknowledged that Tepco's plans were feasible, but warned there could be unforeseen setbacks.

"I believe that this is definitely a workable solution. However, there are frequent aftershocks as we speak, and unfortunately, there have been cases

where the situation deteriorated from lack of measures."

Edano said he hoped some of the tens of thousands of families evacuated from the area around the power station would be allowed to go home eventually, but that it was hard to say when.

When pressed by reporters, he refused to confirm whether he believed they would all be able to return.

The issue for people in Japan is a shortage of information, says the BBC's Roland Buerk in Tokyo.

About two-thirds of respondents in the telephone polls conducted over the weekend by the Asahi Shimbun, Mainichi Shimbun and the Nikkei business daily said Prime Minister Naoto Kan should be replaced.

Opposition leaders have been urging the prime minister to resign, accusing him of weak leadership.

Kan again faced criticism in parliament yesterday - with one opposition lawmaker suggesting he had been ill-prepared for the outset.

Kan remained defiant, saying: "Japan has never before faced a crisis like this... We are doing our utmost."



The remains of unidentified tsunami victims are placed at the Dainenji temple in Otsuchi, Iwate prefecture in Japan yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## NEWS IN brief

### Kabul attack on defence ministry kills two

AFP, Kabul

Suspected Taliban militants shot dead two soldiers and injured seven others yesterday in an audacious attack inside the Afghan defence ministry which the militia said was aimed at France's defence minister.

A suicide bomber wearing army uniform was killed inside the building before he could detonate, the ministry's spokesman said following the assault which struck at the heart of the embattled Kabul government.

French Defence Minister Gerard Longuet is currently on a visit to Afghanistan but was not in the build-

### Russia's president calls for drug testing in schools

AFP, Irkutsk

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev yesterday called for drug testing in schools, warning that narcotics abuse was now such a major problem that it was weighing down the economy.

Speaking at a government meeting in the Siberian city of Irkutsk, identified by officials as a particular trouble spot for abuse, Medvedev said that no fewer than 2.5 million Russians were drug addicts.

The president said the problem was costing Russia between two and three percent of the gross domestic product and that the country may have no option but to resort to drug testing in schools.

Medvedev, who is usually regarded as one of the more liberal of Russian leaders, said that testing may

### Protests in Nigeria over Jonathan's poll win

REUTERS, Kano

Security forces deployed on the streets of Nigeria's northern cities yesterday to try to contain protests by youths angered at results showing President Goodluck Jonathan won the presidential election.

Votes counted from all but one of Nigeria's 36 states showed Jonathan, the president from the southern oil-producing Niger Delta, had beaten Muhammadu Buhari, a former military ruler from the Muslim north, in the first round.

Observers have called the poll the fairest in decades in Africa's most populous nation but Buhari's supporters accuse the ruling party of rigging. Results show how politically polarized the country is, with Buhari sweeping states in the Muslim north and Jonathan

### Sri Lankan Tamil party hails UN war crimes report

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's main Tamil political party yesterday hailed a leaked UN report which called for an international war crimes probe into the island's political and military leadership.

The moderate Tamil National Alliance (TNA) said the report, commissioned by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, amounted to "irrefutable confirmation" of atrocities during the final stages of fighting in 2009.

"We welcome the recommendations made by the panel and trust that they will be honestly imple-

### Dubai hosts anti-piracy conference

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

A conference to tackle maritime piracy has opened in Dubai as attacks hit record numbers despite international naval efforts to stem the activity.

The two-day conference, themed "Global Challenge, Regional Responses: Forging a Common Approach to Maritime Piracy", is attended by shipping industry leaders, foreign ministers and independent experts.

It focuses on "the widespread threats of piracy and

## Libyan forces shell Misrata

17 people killed

REUTERS, Ajdabiyah

Forces loyal to Muammar Gaddafi bombarded Misrata with rockets and artillery yesterday and pounded the insurgents' eastern frontline outpost of Ajdabiyah, rebels said.

A rebel spokesman said 17 people were killed in shelling on Sunday in Misrata, Libya's third-largest city, which has been under heavy bombardment for the past five days, and shelling continued yesterday.

Misrata is the rebels' only major stronghold in the west of the country and has been under siege by pro-Gaddafi forces for the past seven weeks. Evacuees say conditions there are becoming increasingly desperate. Hundreds of civilians are believed to have been killed.

"The Gaddafi forces are shelling Misrata now. They are firing rockets and artillery rounds on the eastern side -- the Nakl el Thegeel (road) and the residential areas around it," Abdubasset Abu Mzeireq said from the coastal city.

He said about 100 people were also wounded in Sunday's clashes, mostly civilians.

Pro-Gaddafi forces also kept up an offensive on the rebels' eastern frontline outpost of Ajdabiyah, which rebels want to use as a

staging post to retake the oil port of Brega, 50 miles to the west.

One witness said he saw around a dozen rockets land near the western entrance to Ajdabiyah on Sunday and many fled as explosions boomed across the town.

"There are still some guys out there at the western gate but the situation isn't very good," said Wassim el-Agouri, a 25-year-old rebel volunteer waiting at Ajdabiyah's eastern gate.

"We want weapons, modern weapons," said rebel Ayman Aswey, 21. "If we had those, we could advance against them."

Sunday marked a month since the UN Security Council passed a resolution authorizing force to protect civilians in Libya, leading to an international air campaign. But despite Nato air strikes against Gaddafi's armor, rebels have been unable to hold gains in weeks of back-and-forth fighting over the coastal towns in eastern Libya.

With Nato troops bogged down in Afghanistan, Western countries have ruled out sending ground troops, a position reinforced by the British prime minister on Sunday.

"What we've said is there is no question of invasion or an occupation -- this is not about Britain putting boots on the ground," David Cameron told Sky News in an interview.

## UN chief calls for ceasefire in Libya

AFP, Budapest

UN chief Ban Ki-moon yesterday called for an immediate ceasefire and a political solution to the conflict in Libya and said the United Nations would open a humanitarian mission in Tripoli.

"We have three objectives: first, an immediate, effective ceasefire; second, to extend our humanitarian assistance to the needy; third, we have to continue to have a political dialogue and a political resolution to the issue," Ban told reporters on a three-day visit to Hungary. "Considering the magnitude of the crisis, it is absolutely necessary that Libyan authorities stop fighting and killing people," he said.

To find a political solution, Ban called for international action "in coordination with the Libyan people".

## Yemen tense as calls on Saleh to quit grow

AFP, Sanaa

Tension simmered in Yemen yesterday after a fruitless meeting with Gulf mediators and late night demonstrations turned violent in Sanaa.

The streets of Sanaa appeared quiet yesterday following overnight clashes with security forces, an AFP correspondent reported.

Late on Sunday, hundreds of thousands of men and women protested against President Ali Abdullah Saleh's call for an end to men and women demonstrating together against the regime, and called for his ouster.

Security forces soon attacked them, opening fire and shooting tear gas grenades, leaving 30 people injured by live rounds and 1,000 suffering from suffocation, an AFP video reporter quoted a medical source at a Sanaa hospital as saying.

Security forces also used water cannon to disperse demonstrators as police cars carried away many wounded protesters, witnesses told AFP.

Early on yesterday, residents took to the streets in the Red Sea city of Al-Hudaydah to protest against the use of force against Sanaa demonstrators.

After a meeting in Riyadh with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states ministers, leading Common Forum opposition activist Mohammed al-Sabri told AFP yesterday: "The opposition has succeeded in conveying its point of view to Gulf Arab monarchies" on the necessity of Saleh's departure.

Arab Gulf monarchies "must understand that every day Saleh's regime remains in power will be on the account of their stability", added Sabri.

## LATEST LEAKS

### US secretly backed Syrian opposition

REUTERS, Washington

The State Department has secretly funded Syrian opposition groups, according to diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks, The Washington Post reported yesterday.

The cables show that the State Department has funneled as much as \$6 million since 2006 to a group of Syrian exiles to operate a London-based satellite channel, Barada TV, and finance activities inside Syria, the Post said.

Barada TV began broadcasting in April 2009 but has ramped up operations to cover the mass protests in Syria that began last month as part of a long-standing campaign to overthrow President Bashar al-Assad the Post said.

The US money for Syrian opposition figures began flowing under President George W. Bush after political ties with Damascus were frozen in 2005, the newspaper said.

The financial backing has continued under President Barack Obama, even as his administration sought to rebuild relations with Assad, the Post said. In January, the White House posted an ambassador to Damascus for the first time in six years.

The article said it is unclear whether the United States was still funding Syrian opposition groups, but the cables indicate money was set aside at least through September 2010.

An uprising against Assad's authoritarian rule have spread across large parts of the country. Rights groups put the death toll at more than 200 people.

## ASSEMBLY POLLS

### Marxists face vote for survival in W Bengal

AFP, Kolkata

The Indian state of West Bengal went to the polls yesterday in a vote that looked set to end three decades of uninterrupted rule by the world's oldest democratically elected communist government.

The Left Front, led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist), or CPI-M had, until recently, won every election in the eastern state since 1977.

But straight successive losses in council, parliamentary and municipal polls have left the communists struggling for survival.

Opinion polls suggest the Left Front is headed for a crushing defeat at the hands of a woman who has emerged as one of India's most powerful and feisty politicians, Mamata Banerjee -- known to her followers simply as "didi" or sister.

Banerjee, a populist who casts herself as a champion of the poor, has ridden a wave of popular discontent with the Communist government's handling of the economy that has left industry in decline and the state

neck-deep in debt.

"The government's defeat is written on the wall," Banerjee, 56, told a recent campaign rally. "History is about to be made."

West Bengal is one of five states going to the polls in a round of regional elections that has caught India's ruling coalition, led by the Congress party, at a bad time.

A raft of corruption scandals and a surge in food price inflation have seriously undermined the political standing of the federal government and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

Congress is fighting the West Bengal poll in an alliance with Banerjee's Trinamool Congress which, with 19 seats in the federal parliament, is a key coalition partner.

One recent opinion poll forecast the Trinamool alliance would sweep the elections, winning 215 of the 294 state assembly seats while the communists would get just 74 -- a result that would effectively consign the once-powerful Marxists to the margins of Indian politics.

## Car bombs kill 9 in Baghdad

AP, Baghdad

Suicide bombers detonated two explosives-packed cars yesterday outside Baghdad's heavily fortified Green Zone, killing at least nine people and wounding 23, officials said.

The blasts marked the start of a violent day in the Iraqi capital, where another bombing and a jewelry heist left two more dead and 13 wounded.

The twin suicide car bombs rattled windows across Baghdad shortly after 8 a.m. The cars blew up just outside a security checkpoint on a heavily traveled road leading into the Green Zone from Baghdad's international airport.

Pieces of charred flesh were still scattered at the scene hours later as a tow truck hauled away a wrecked Iraqi Humvee and other bombed-out cars.



A picture taken by a mobile phone shows a funeral in Homs, 160 kilometres (100 miles) to the north of Damascus, Syria yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Fresh protests rattle Syria as death toll mounts

AFP, Damascus

Fresh protests shook Syria yesterday as thousands took to the streets a day after 11 people were killed by security forces as the clamour for an end to martial law billowed, activists said.

Protests gripped the central city of Homs, the protest hub of Daraa in the south as well as in Jisr al-Shoughour near the northwestern city of Idleb despite pledges by the president to lift a draconian emergency law.

Activists have said Assad's vow on Saturday to lift within a week nearly five decades of emergency law were insufficient, and protests shook Syria again within hours of the presidential speech.

Protesters are also demanding the release of political prisoners and the end of the ruling Baath party's grip over the state and society as stipulated by the constitution. Tens of thousands of mourners marched

in Homs yesterday a day after security forces fired live rounds to disperse demonstrators in the Bab Sba'a area of town, killing at least seven people, activists said.

A sea of mourners swamped the city for the funerals of the seven people killed and their coffins were held shoulder high above the crowds, some open, others covered with Syrian flags, witnesses said.

Many of them clapping their hands, mourners called for "the fall of the regime" and "freedom" as they paid tribute to the "martyrs," activists said. About 3,000 people also staged a sit-in in the city centre.

Two activists spoke of seven dead in Homs, but a third one said nine had died late Saturday. They all agreed however that some 20 people had been wounded.

Tensions had been running high in Homs since the announcement on Saturday that a Muslim cleric arrested a week earlier had died in custody.