

Japan reels

▶ Second blast rocks nuke plant as authorities battle to control two overheating reactors to avert a meltdown after the cooling systems were knocked out

▶ Quake/tsunami estimated to have killed over 10,000 people

▶ Nearly 600,000 people evacuated from quake and nuclear disaster areas

▶ 100,000 troops deployed to help survivors

▶ Economic toll estimated between US\$14.5bil and US\$34.6bil

▶ Nikkei stock index falls 6.18% to 9,620.49 points

▶ Crisis described by PM Naoto Kan as the worst since World War II

▶ More calls across the world for caution in pursuing nuclear energy

▶ Malaysia, Singapore and Taiwan checking food imports from Japan for radiation

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GRIEF-STRICKEN ... A woman cries while sitting on a road in the destroyed city of Natori, Miyagi Prefecture in northern Japan yesterday, after a massive earthquake and tsunami that are feared to have killed more than 10,000 people.

REUTERSPIX

Almost 600,000 evacuated, says UN

SNM 15/12/2011 MS 2.

Second blast

GENEVA: About 590,000 people have been evacuated in Japan over the last three days following the devastating earthquake and tsunami there on Friday, the United Nations said on Sunday.

At the same time there is growing anxiety about the reactors in a number of nuclear power stations, it added.

“About 380,000 people have been evacuated from the tsunami and earthquake-affected areas and are being sheltered in 2,050 evacuation centres.

According to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) authorities have also evacuated another 210,000 people living within a 20km radius around the Fukushima nuclear power plants,” the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said in an update.

Rescue teams from all over the world – from the United States, Switzerland, Australia and Mexico among many nations – are being deployed to help the huge numbers of victims and find those missing.

But, OCHA said, the rescue operations were “hampered by continuous aftershocks, tsunami alerts and fires.”

“Many areas along the northeast coast remain isolated and unreachable by emergency

services. To date, 3,000 people have been rescued.”

Thousands of people are still reported missing after the tsunami unclenched by the quake, which according to the United States Geological Survey had a magnitude of 8.9, the strongest in Japan’s history and probably responsible for more than 10,000 deaths.

“A seven-member UNDAC (UN Disaster and Assessment) team has arrived in Tokyo,” OCHA said.

“The team will assist the government of Japan’s efforts and coordinate the international Urban Search and Rescue teams, as well as assist with assessments and environmental hazard analysis.”

“The main humanitarian needs are food, drinking water, blankets, fuel and medical items which the government and private sector in Japan are urgently mobilising and sending to the affected areas.

“The government says 2.6 million households are without electricity and nearly 3.2 million people are running out of gas supplies. This is critical as it is winter in Japan and the temperature is dropping to one degree Celsius overnight,” OCHA said.

It added that “1.4 million people also have no access to water.” Hospitals are reportedly coping with the number of patients.” – AFP

> Nation struggles with a crisis described by Prime Minister Naoto Kan as the worst since World War II

SENDAI: A new explosion at a nuclear plant hit punch-drunk Japan yesterday as it raced to avert a reactor meltdown after a quake-tsunami disaster that is feared to have killed more than 10,000 people.

Panic selling saw stocks close more than 6% lower on the Tokyo bourse on fears for the world’s third-biggest economy, as power shortages prompted rolling blackouts and factories shut down in quake-hit areas.

Kyodo news agency said 2,000 bodies had been found on the shores of Miyagi prefecture, which took the brunt of the tsunami.

But it was the fear of a nuclear disaster looming on top of the quake and tsunami that gripped the embattled nation as it struggled with a crisis described by Prime Minister Naoto Kan as the worst since World War II.

Japan has been battling to control two overheating reactors at the ageing Fukushima plant after the cooling systems were knocked out by Friday’s 8.9-magnitude quake and the resulting tsunami that swallowed up whole towns.

A first explosion blew apart the building surrounding the plant’s number-one reactor on Saturday but

the seal around the reactor itself remained intact, officials said.

Yesterday, shortly after Kan said the plant was still in an “alarming” state, a blast at its number-three reactor shook the facility and sent plumes of smoke billowing into the sky.

The core container of the No. 3 reactor was intact after the explosion, the government said, but it warned those in the 20km evacuation zone to stay indoors. So far, about 210,000 people have been evacuated from the area.

The plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co (TEPCO), said 11 people had been injured in the blast, and Jiji news agency said seven people, six of them soldiers, were missing.

The UN atomic watchdog IAEA said radiation levels at the plant were “normal” but a Japanese official said before the blast 22 people had been confirmed to have suffered radiation contamination and up to 190 may have been exposed. Workers in protective clothing used hand-held scanners to check people arriving at evacuation centres.



Later yesterday, the cooling system at the number two reactor failed, Jiji Press reported – the sort of failure that preceded the explosions in the number one and three reactors.

The US nuclear-powered aircraft carrier *Ronald Reagan*, on a humanitarian mission to Japan, reportedly passed through a radioactive cloud from the plant and its crew received a month’s worth of radiation in about an hour.

There was no indication that any of the military personnel had experienced ill effects from the exposure, the *New York Times* reported citing unnamed government officials.

But the episode showed that the prevailing winds were picking up radioactive material from the crippled



This aerial shot shows a pleasure boat sitting on top of a building amid a sea of debris in Otsuchi town in Iwate prefecture yesterday.

rocks nuke plant

SUN 15/3/2011 MS 3

BRIEFS

FUEL RODS 'FULLY EXPOSED'

TOKYO: The fuel rods in the number two reactor at a quake-damaged nuclear power plant in Japan are again "fully exposed", boosting fears of an eventual partial meltdown, local media reported early yesterday. Air pressure inside the reactor at the Fukushima No. 1 plant rose suddenly when the air flow gauge was accidentally turned off, public broadcaster NHK said. Japan has provided 230,000 units of stable iodine to evacuation centres as a precautionary measure, the International Atomic Energy Agency said yesterday. — Agencies

JAPAN ASKS IAEA FOR HELP

VIENNA: Japan has officially asked the UN atomic watchdog to send a team of experts to help in the current nuclear crisis, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief Yukiya Amano said yesterday. "Today, the government of Japan asked the agency to provide expert missions. We are in discussion with Japan on the details," Amano told IAEA member states. — AFP

US CARRIER BACKS AWAY

TOKYO: A US aircraft carrier deployed off tsunami-hit Japan for relief efforts has repositioned after detecting low-level radiation from a malfunctioning nuclear power plant, a US statement said yesterday. "The US Seventh Fleet has temporarily repositioned its ships and aircraft away from the Fukushima Dai-ichi (No. 1) nuclear power plant after detecting low level contamination in the air and on its aircraft operating in the area." — AFP

CHINESE GOODWILL

BEIJING: A 15-member rescue team from China arrived in Japan on Sunday to search

wave came behind them. The bus driver told everybody to get out of the bus and run," said Otomo, a mother of three teens who herself managed to escape the deadly wall of water in her car.

"My sister was able to get away but some people just couldn't run fast enough," she told AFP.

Otomo, whose home near Sendai was destroyed in the twin disasters, says she quickly piled her father and her dog in the car in her own desperate bid to survive.

"The tsunami wave was coming and I grabbed grandfather and our dog and drove. The wave was right behind me, but I had to keep zigzagging around obstacles and the water to get to safety."

Otomo is now staying at an evacuation centre in a local school with about 1,000 other exhausted survivors who cheated death.

A new tsunami scare triggered evacuations on the devastated northeast coast yesterday after a large wave was spotted rolling in to shore, but authorities later lifted the alert. With ports, airports, highways and manufacturing plants shut down, the government has predicted "considerable impact on a wide range of our country's economic activities".

Leading risk analysis firm AIR Worldwide said the quake alone would exact an economic toll estimated at between US\$14.5 billion (RM44.9 billion) and US\$34.6 billion (RM107.3 billion), without taking into account the effects of the tsunami.

Kan said in a televised national address Sunday that Japan was facing its worst crisis



An elderly survivor is rescued by local residents in the devastated town of Minamisanriku, Miyagi prefecture yesterday.

fortunate, though the image of victims violently swept away last week by the black tide of wrecked houses and cars near the hard-hit city of Sendai will be forever seared in her memory.

"My older sister was in a bus when the

Fukushima plant, the newspaper noted.

Tsunami survivors who were able to outrun Friday's killer wave meanwhile recalled how they saw those behind them consumed by the torrent of mud and debris.

Miki Otomo's sister was one of the



People rush to higher ground as a new tsunami warning is announced in the city of Rikuzentakata in Iwate prefecture yesterday.

since the end of World War II – which left the defeated country in ruins after two US atomic attacks forced its surrender.

The United Nations said a total of 590,000 people had been evacuated in the quake and tsunami disaster.

The national police agency said the confirmed death toll now stood at 1,597, but groups of hundreds of bodies were being found along the shattered coastline. The police chief in badly hit Miyagi prefecture said the death toll was certain to exceed 10,000 in his region.

Japan committed 100,000 troops to help survivors as the world rallied behind the disaster-stricken nation. – Agencies

Japan quake devastation

A massive tsunami triggered by a magnitude-8.9 earthquake has killed hundreds of people in Japan. Some nuclear plants and refineries in the area have been shut down



China arrived in Japan on Sunday to search for survivors from a massive earthquake and tsunami, barely six months after Asia's two largest economies faced off in a bitter territorial dispute. Setting aside the acrimony over Japan's wartime atrocities that underpins widespread Chinese public distrust of Japan, Beijing has wasted no time in expressing sympathy for the disaster. – Reuters

CHAMPIONSHIPS OFF

PARIS: The International Skating Union said yesterday it had called off the World Figure Skating Championships to be held in Tokyo from March 21-27 following the devastating earthquake and tsunami. – AFP

NO SPIKE IN RADIATION

MANILA: Philippine authorities said yesterday they were checking for spikes in radiation levels following two explosions at a nuclear plant in Japan, but that there had been no irregular increases. – AFP

US SAFE, SAYS OFFICIALS

WASHINGTON: Radiation from nuclear plants damaged in Japan's earthquake is unlikely to reach US territory in harmful amounts, US nuclear officials said on Sunday. "Given the thousands of miles between the two countries, Hawaii, Alaska, the US Territories and the US West Coast are not expected to experience any harmful levels of radioactivity," the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission said. – AFP

EMERGENCY SESSIONS

SEOUL: South Korea yesterday held emergency sessions of four parliamentary committees to discuss how to respond to the impact of the quake and tsunami in Japan, including the risk of radiation leaks. The science committee met to discuss the possible impact on the Korean peninsula from Saturday's explosion of a nuclear reactor in the Fukushima power plant. – Reuters

BH GIVEN STERN WARNING

KUALA LUMPUR: Information Communication and Culture Minister Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim said *Berita Harian* had been given a stern warning for publishing in its Sunday edition, the *Berita Minggu*, a cartoon that treated the devastating earthquake and tsunami that hit Japan as a joke. He however said no legal action could be taken against the newspaper. – Bernama