How a Reactor Shuts Down and What Happens in a Meltdown

The operating reactors at Fukushima Daiichi power station automatically shut down during the earthquake. But after cooling failures, two of them went into partial meltdown.

In Japan, there was no electricity to run the cooling system. Operators added water, intending to vent the steam and replace the water as it evaporated. But the water boiled away faster than they could replace it.