

## Nuclear focus shifts to crack in reactor No. 2

### Unpopular Japanese PM visits tsunami-hit village, offers aid

BY KIYOSHI TAKENAKA AND CHISA FUJIOKA, REUTERS APRIL 3, 2011



People search the ruins of their home Saturday in Rikuzentakata. The area was devastated by the earthquake and tsunami.  
**Photograph by:** Damir Sagolj, Reuters, Reuters

Japanese officials grappling today to end the world's worst nuclear crisis since Chernobyl were focusing on a crack in a concrete pit that was leaking radiation into the ocean from a crippled reactor.

Tokyo Electric Power Co. said it had found a crack in the pit at its No. 2 reactor in Fukushima, generating readings 1,000 millisieverts of radiation per hour in the air inside the pit.

"With radiation levels rising in the seawater near the plant, we have been trying to confirm the reason why, and in that context, this could be one source," said Hidehiko Nishiyama, deputy head of the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, said Saturday.

He cautioned, however: "We can't really say for certain until we've studied the results."

Leakage did not stop even after concrete was poured into the pit, and Tokyo Electric is now planning to use water-absorbent polymer to prevent contaminated water from leaking out into the sea.

Officials from the utility said checks of the other five reactors found no cracks.

Nishiyama said that to cool the damaged reactor, NISA was looking at alternatives to pumping in water, including an improvised air-conditioning system, spraying the reactor fuel rods with vaporized water or using the plant's cleaning system.

As the disaster that has left more than 27,000 dead or missing dragged into a fourth week, Prime Minister Naoto Kan toured devastated coastal towns in northern Japan on Saturday, offering refugees government support for rebuilding homes and livelihoods.

"It will be kind of a long battle, but the government will be working hard together with you until the end," Kyodo news agency quoted him as telling people in a shelter in Rikuzentakata, a fishing port flattened by the tsunami which struck on March 11 after a massive earthquake.

Unpopular and under pressure to quit or call a snap poll before the disaster, Kan has been criticized for his management of the humanitarian and nuclear crisis. Some tsunami survivors said he came to visit them too late.

Japan is facing a damages bill which may top \$300 billion -the world's biggest from a natural disaster.

The International Monetary Fund said Friday the Japanese economy would take a short-term hit and it could not rule out further intervention for the yen.

The consequences for the world's third-largest economy have already seen manufacturing slump to a two-year low. Power outages and quake damage have hit supply chains and production.

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