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Japan: Explosion at Nuclear Plant North of Tokyo

By LUCY BIRMINGHAM / TOKYO Saturday, Mar. 12, 2011

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Smoke rises from Fukushima Daiichi 1 nuclear reactor after an explosion March 12, 2011 in this still image from a video footage.

NTV / Reuters

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A day after Japan was hit by a double blow — a monster earthquake followed by a killer tsunami — the full extent of death and destruction is still unclear. By Saturday 11 p.m. Tokyo time, the official toll was 574 people dead, 1,128 injured and 784 missing, but those figures are expected to rise dramatically in coming days.

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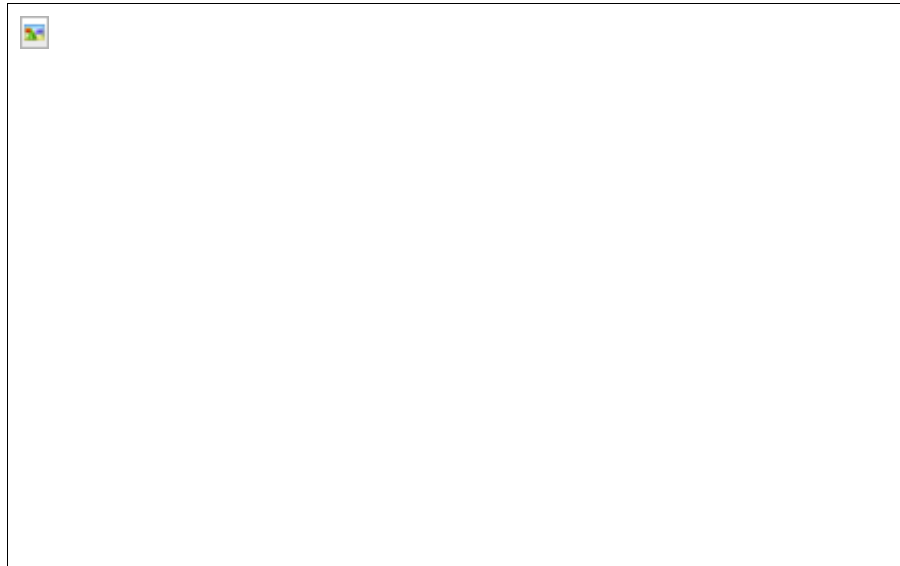
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Aftershocks are continuing and fires from burning oil storage tanks have yet to be put out. The biggest new risk is the possibility of a reactor meltdown at the Fukushima nuclear power plant no. 1, one of two such facilities where the fuel rod cooling system failed. On Saturday evening local time, an explosion occurred at the Fukushima plant, reportedly destroying walls. Authorities expanded the evacuation zone from a 10 km to a 20 km radius. Even before the explosion, Japan's Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency had reported leaks of the radioactive nuclear material cesium.

(See pictures of the earthquake's destruction.)



Much of northeastern Japan, which was hardest-hit, is still under water, and entire neighborhoods have been buried by mud and debris. Damage in the biggest city in the region, Sendai, which has a population of about 1 million, has yet to be properly assessed. Four trains plying coastal routes have disappeared. Search and rescue efforts have been hampered by collapsed and blocked highways and roads. Food and water are scarce, and countless numbers of people are stranded and without heat and power. Tokyo's airports are still closed. On-the-ground reports from the badly affected areas are few and incomplete.

U.S. President Barack Obama called the quake a 'potentially catastrophic disaster' and pledged military and other assistance. U.S. military units based in Japan offered to participate in rescue operations and other humanitarian missions should the Japanese government ask for help. The U.S. Navy's Seventh Fleet is based

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near Tokyo. Some 50 other nations said they were standing by to help if needed.

(See the economic impact of the quake.)

It will take time for Japan to weigh the full economic implications of the disaster. Earthquakes tend to have less impact on major economies than first expected. The areas badly hit on Friday are less economically important than the coastal industrial zones that suffered greatly after the 1995 Kobe earthquake. But the disaster could create even more uncertainty about Japan's recovery from its worst postwar recession. Says Richard Jerram, chief Asia economist of the Macquarie Group: "The fragile economic cycle is not in a position to withstand significant disruption."

(Comment on this story.)

Koichi and Yukiko Fujii, an elderly couple now living in Tokyo, were residents of Kobe when the quake hit there. "Kobe was terrifying but this one in Tokyo was a lot worse," says Yukiko. Koichi turned 85 on Friday. "This is quite a birthday present ... I have lived through World War II, and two of the worst earthquakes in Japan's history. I sure hope this is it for a while." Sadly, for Japan and its people, the suffering is far from over.

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Echo 4 Items

[Admin](#)**Korin Bates**

Japan has declared five nuclear emergencies. One of their nuclear power plants is in partial meltdown and is on track for a full nuclear meltdown disaster. Seizium has been released. Its getting worse. This is going to be the worst nuclear disaster in history only one hour north of Tokyo. <http://71-32-92-211.tukw.qwest.net/fsx.htm>

Today, 8:22:15 AM – Flag – Reply

**Rinykia Robshi**

I hope will be ok...

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**Luo Qing**

I'm a Chinese people from Hebei, We're sorry for Japanese victim. Let's pray for them all.

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**xinghaobsb**

everything will be ok 😊

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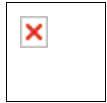
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JON CRYER, Charlie Sheen's *Two and a Half Men* co-star, responding Sheen's insult that he is a troll

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