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UPDATE 1-Japan nuclear operator aims for cold shutdown in 6-9 months

2:32am EDT

TOKYO, April 17 (Reuters) - Japanese nuclear power plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) hopes it will be able to achieve cold shutdown of its crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant within six to nine months, the company said on Sunday.

The firm said the first step would be cooling the reactors and spent fuel to a stable level within three months, then bring the reactors to cold shutdown in six to nine months. That would make the plant safe and stable and end the immediate crisis, now rated on a par with the world's worst nuclear accident, the 1986 Chernobyl disaster.

TEPCO added it later plans to cover the reactor buildings, damaged by a massive earthquake and tsunami that struck on March 11.

Latest data shows much more radiation leaked from the Daiichi plant in the early days of the crisis than first thought, prompting officials to rate it on a par with Chernobyl.

Experts were quick to point out the two crises were vastly different in terms of radiation contamination.

The toll from Japan's triple catastrophe is rising. More than 13,000 people have been confirmed dead, and on Wednesday the government cut its outlook for the economy, in deflation for almost 15 years, for the first time in six months.

[ID:nL3E7FD0DS] (Reporting by [Taiga Uranaka](#); Writing by [Elaine Lies](#); Editing by [Daniel Magnowski](#))

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