

HOME PAGE TODAY'S PAPER VIDEO MOST POPULAR TIMES TOPICS

Subscribe: Digital / Home Delivery | Log In | Register Now | Help

The New York Times

Asia Pacific

Search All NYTimes.com

Orange Home Loans
As low as 3.05% APR

WORLD U.S. N.Y. / REGION BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY SCIENCE HEALTH SPORTS OPINION ARTS STYLE TRAVEL JOBS REAL ESTATE AUTOS

AFRICA AMERICAS ASIA PACIFIC EUROPE MIDDLE EAST

NOW ENJOY BRILLIANT COLLEGE COURSES IN YOUR HOME OR CAR!

THE GREAT COURSES

Order one of these BEST-SELLING COURSES for only: **\$9.95!**

UNLIMITED TIME OFFERS SAVE UP TO \$190 (ORDER TODAY!)

Advertise on NYTimes.com

Japan Strains to Fix a Reactor Damaged Before Quake



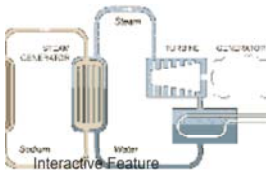
Kosuke Okahara for The New York Times

Local men fished near the Monju reactor in Tsuruga, a long-troubled project that has been shut down since August.

By HIROKO TABUCHI
Published: June 17, 2011

TSURUGA, Japan — Three hundred miles southwest of Fukushima, at a nuclear reactor perched on the slopes of this rustic peninsula, engineers are engaged in another precarious struggle.

Multimedia



The Monju prototype fast-breeder reactor — a long-troubled national project — has been in a precarious state of shutdown since a 3.3-ton device crashed into the reactor's inner vessel, cutting off access to the plutonium and uranium fuel rods at its core.

Engineers have tried repeatedly since the accident last August to recover the device, which appears to have gotten stuck. They will make another attempt as early as next week.

But critics warn that the recovery process is fraught with dangers because the plant uses large quantities of liquid sodium, a highly flammable substance, to cool the nuclear fuel.

The Monju reactor, which forms the cornerstone of a national project by resource-poor [Japan](#) to reuse and eventually produce nuclear fuel, shows the tensions between the scale of Japan's nuclear ambitions and the risks.

RECOMMEND

TWITTER

SIGN IN TO E-MAIL

PRINT

SINGLE PAGE

REPRINTS

SHARE



Related

[Tepco Halts Filtering of Tainted Water at Japanese Plant \(June 19, 2011\)](#)

[Enlarge This Image](#)

Log in to see what your friends are sharing on nytimes.com. [Privacy Policy](#) | [What's This?](#)

Log In With Facebook

What's Popular Now

Raise, Don't Save, Social Security



90 Years After a Bloody Race Riot, Tulsa Confronts Its Past



Ads by Google

what's this?

Wilderness 1st Responder

Next Course: October 17-26 Planet Granite, San Francisco
[www.remotemedical.com](#)

Struggling with PPC

There is a better way. Expand your keywords and ad networks. No cost!
[www.trada.com/PPC](#)

American Apocalypse 2011?

Top analyst warns "The American way of life to end forever" You decide.
[www.MoneyandMarkets.com](#)

NEW San Jose Condo

Luxury Homes. Stunning Views. Visit Here To View Floor Plans!
[www.AxisSanJose.com](#)

Have Severe Back Pain?

Schedule An Appointment Today With One Of Our Spine Specialists
[Cedars-Sinai.edu](#)

TUCOM: Live COMLEX Review

Level 1 Available NOW Sign Up Today!
[www.boardsbootcamp.com](#)

Advertise on NYTimes.com

Today's Headlines Daily E-Mail



Sign up for a roundup of the day's top stories, sent every morning.

[See Sample](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

Sign Up

MOST E-MAILED

RECOMMENDED FOR YOU

1. [House May Vote This Week on Money for Libya Strikes](#)



2. [Debate Swirls Around Research Showing Lung Problems for Returned Troops](#)



3. [James P. Hosty, Investigated Oswald, Dies at 86](#)

PRESENTED BY

Log in to discover more articles based on what you've read.



The New York Times
Monju is 60 miles from Kyoto, a city of 1.5 million people.

The plant, a \$12 billion project, has a history of safety lapses. It was shuttered for 14 years after a devastating fire in 1995, one of Japan's most serious nuclear accidents before this year's crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station. Prefecture and city officials found that the operator had tampered with video images of the fire to hide the scale of the disaster. A top manager at the plant recently committed suicide, on the day that Japan's atomic energy agency announced that efforts to recover the device would cost almost \$21.9 million. And, like several other reactors, Monju lies on an active fault.

Even if the device can be removed, restarting the reactor will be risky, given its safety record and its use of highly toxic plutonium as fuel, said Hideyuki Ban, co-director of the [Citizens' Nuclear Information Center](#), a watchdog group, and a member of an advisory government committee on Japan's long-term [nuclear energy](#) policy. The plant is 60 miles from Kyoto, a city of 1.5 million people, and the fast-breeder design of the reactor makes it more prone to Chernobyl-type runaway reactions in the case of a severe accident, critics say.

"Let's say they make this fix, which is very complicated," Mr. Ban said. "The rest of the reactor remains highly dangerous. And an accident at Monju would have catastrophic consequences beyond what we are seeing at Fukushima."

Japan badly needs sources of energy. By closing the loop on its nuclear fuel cycle, Japan aims to reuse, recycle and produce fresh fuel for its 54 reactors.

"Monju is a vital national asset," said Noritomo Narita, a spokesman here in Tsuruga for the reactor's operator, the government-backed Japan Atomic Energy Agency. "In a country so poor in resources, such as Japan, the efficient use of nuclear fuel is our national policy, and our mission."

Critics have been fighting the project since its inception in the 1970s. "It's Japan's most dangerous reactor," said Miwako Ogiso, secretary general of the Council of the People of Fukui Prefecture Against Nuclear Power. "It's Japan's most nonsensical reactor."

After promises of safety upgrades, as well as lavish subsidies and public works, the government has wooed local officials into allowing a restart of the reactor. In Fukui, the government had ready allies: with 14 nuclear reactors, it is Japan's most nuclear-friendly prefecture. (Fukushima, in second place, has 10 reactors.)

Monju was reopened in May 2010, and just three months later, the 3.3-ton fuel relay device fell into the pressure vessel when a loose clutch gave way. In the two decades since the reactor started tests in 1991, the atomic energy agency has managed to generate electricity at the reactor only for one full hour.

In Monju, Japan is pursuing a technology that most countries have long abandoned. Decades ago, a handful of countries, including the United States, started exploring similar programs. But severe technical difficulties, as well as fears about the weapons-grade plutonium that the cycle eventually produces, have led most countries to scrap their programs.

But Japan has remained staunchly committed to the Monju project. The government of Prime Minister Naoto Kan has shielded it from the deep cuts in spending that it has required of other national projects since it came to power in September 2009.

Under a government plan, Japan would use technology developed at Monju to commercialize fast-breeder reactors by 2050.

Mr. Kan has recently hinted at an overhaul of Japan's nuclear policy, though he has not commented specifically on the fate of the Monju reactor.

Log In Register Now f Log In

What's This? | Don't Show

X-Men: First Class
 88% of users liked it
 86% of critics liked it
 James McAvoy, Michael Fassbender
 PG-13, 2 hr. 11 min.
 ▶ Play Trailer

Apps for the movie buff

ALSO IN TECH »

America's pastime: smartphone games
 Order sushi like a native

nytimes.com

TECH

ADVERTISEMENTS



Have You Read The Book of Lowe?
 NYTimes.com/Arts

An Important Change at NYTimes.com
 Now there are two ways to access our content — as a visitor or as a subscriber.
 nytimes.com TO LEARN MORE, CLICK HERE >>

ELLINGTON
 LIVE HIGH
 HOMES WITH A VIEW
 Advertise on NYTimes.com

A version of this article appeared in print on June 18, 2011, on page A4 of the New York edition with the headline: Another Reactor in Japan Tests Nation's Will.

SIGN IN TO E-MAIL

PRINT

SINGLE PAGE

REPRINTS



The New York Times and the Bay Area -- save 50% on home delivery plus FREE All Digital Access.

More Headlines From Around the Web

Sponsored Links

THE DAILY BEAST

Why Bin Laden Was Not Taken Alive

CFORWORLD

U.S. Government Says Cyber Attacks May Be Acts of War

LIFE

Vietnam War: Disturbing Images

CNBC

11 Nuclear Meltdowns and Disasters

Get Free E-mail Alerts on These Topics

Nuclear Energy

Japan

Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant (Japan)

Accidents and Safety

Ads by Google

what's this?

72 Hour Emergency Kits

Stay Safe 72 Hours After Disaster

Buy Directly from the Manufacturer.

www.QuakeKare.com

INSIDE NYTIMES.COM



BUSINESS »



Olbermann Sets Sights on MSNBC

OPINION »



The Seasons: Summer

WEEK IN REVIEW »



Next Sunday: The Latest Evolution of the Review

N.Y. / REGION »



At Queens School, R.O.T.C.'s Influence

OPINION »

Op-Ed: Defend Muslims, Defend America

Laws that ban courts from considering Sharia law pose a threat to national security.

ARTS »



The Big Man, Much More Than a Sideman

Home | World | U.S. | N.Y. / Region | Business | Technology | Science | Health | Sports | Opinion | Arts | Style | Travel | Jobs | Real Estate | Autos | Site Map

© 2011 The New York Times Company | Privacy | Your Ad Choices | Terms of Service | Terms of Sale | Corrections | RSS | Help | Contact Us | Work for Us | Advertise