

14 MAR, 2011, 01.35PM IST, REUTERS

Japan nuclear blast: Government confirms problems at another reactor

Tuck School at Dartmouth :
www.tuck.dartmouth.edu/about : Recognized as one of the
world's Best Business Schools

Ads by Google

Try ET in a new browser. [Download Google Chrome.](#) 

TOKYO: Japan's government confirmed on Monday that there were problems at the Fukushima Daiichi plant No.2 reactor. Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano said water levels at the reactor were falling.

A hydrogen explosion rocked the nuclear power plant earlier on Monday where authorities have been scrambling to avert a meltdown following Friday's massive earthquake and tsunami.

Crucially, the thick walls appear to be intact around the radioactive cores of the damaged reactors in the nuclear power complex north of Tokyo.

Rescue workers are combing the tsunami-battered northeast for survivors and trying to care for the millions without power or water in Japan's worst crisis since World War Two, that has likely killed at least 10,000 people.

Kyodo news agency reported that 2,000 bodies had been found in two coastal towns alone.

Some analysts said the damage caused by the disaster was so severe and the potential cost was so high -- by one estimate over \$170 billion in just the area directly hit -- that it could even tip Japan's economy back into recession.

The big fear now is of a major radiation leak from the nuclear complex in Fukushima, 240 km (150 miles) north of Tokyo, where engineers have been battling since the weekend to prevent a meltdown in three reactors.

The core container of the No. 3 reactor was intact after the explosion, the government said, but it warned those still in the 20-km (13-mile) evacuation zone to stay indoors. The plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co (TEPCO), said 11 people had been injured in the blast.

"Everything I've seen says that the containment structure is operating as it's designed to operate. It's keeping the radiation in and it's holding everything in, which is the good news," said Murray Jennex, of San Diego State University.

"This is nothing like a Chernobyl... At Chernobyl (in the Ukraine in 1986) you had no containment structure -- when it blew, it blew everything straight out into the atmosphere."

A Japanese official said before the blast that 22 people were confirmed to have suffered radiation contamination and up to 190 may have been exposed. Workers in protective clothing used hand-held scanners to check people arriving at evacuation centres.

U.S. warships and planes helping with relief efforts moved away from the coast temporarily because of low-level radiation. The U.S. Seventh Fleet described the move as precautionary.

The Singapore food authority announced it would begin testing imported Japanese produce for radiation.

NO POWER, NO WATER

Almost 2 million households were without power in the north, the government said. There were about 1.4 million without running water. Tens of thousands of people are missing.

In the town of Otsuchi in Iwate prefecture, 12,000 out of a population of 15,000 have disappeared.

"After my long career in the Red Cross where I have seen many disasters and catastrophes, this is the worst I have ever seen. Otsuchi reminds me of Osaka and Tokyo after the Second World War when everything was destroyed and flattened," Japan Red Cross President Tadateru Konoe told Reuters during a visit to the coastal town.

The government had warned of a possible explosion at the No. 3 reactor because of the buildup of hydrogen in the building housing the reactor. TV images showed smoke rising from the Fukushima facility.

TEPCO, which operates the complex, had earlier halted the injection of sea water into the reactor, resulting in a rise in radiation levels and pressure. The government had warned that an explosion was possible because of the buildup of hydrogen in the building housing the reactor.

A badly wounded nation has seen whole villages and towns wiped off the map by Friday's wall of water, triggering an international humanitarian effort of epic proportions.

"When the tsunami struck, I was trying to evacuate people. I looked back, and then it was like the computer graphics scene I've seen from the movie Armageddon. I thought it was a dream. It was really like the end of the world," said Tsutomu Sato, 46, in Rikuzantakata, a town on the northeast coast.

Prime Minister Naoto Kan said the situation at the 40-year-old Fukushima nuclear plant remained worrisome and that the authorities were doing their utmost to stop damage from spreading.

"We have rescued over 15,000 people and we are working to support them and others. We will do our utmost in rescue efforts again today," he said.

Officials said on Sunday that three nuclear reactors in Fukushima were at risk of overheating, raising fears of an uncontrolled radiation leak.

Engineers worked desperately to cool the fuel rods. If they fail, the containers that house the core could melt, or even explode, releasing radioactive material into the atmosphere.

Nuclear experts said it was probably the first time in the industry's 57-year history that sea water has been used in this way, a sign of how close Japan may be to a major accident.

"Injection of sea water into a core is an extreme measure," Mark Hibbs of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "This is not according to the book."

The nuclear accident, the worst since Chernobyl in Soviet Ukraine in 1986, sparked criticism that authorities were ill-prepared and the threat that could pose to the country's nuclear power industry.

DEATH TOLL "ABOVE 10,000"

Broadcaster NHK, quoting a police official, said more than 10,000 people may have been killed as the wall of water triggered by Friday's 8.9-magnitude quake surged across the coastline, reducing whole towns to rubble. It was the biggest to have hit the quake-prone country since it started keeping records 140 years ago.

Kyodo said 80,000 people had been evacuated from a 20-km (12-mile) radius around the stricken nuclear plant, joining more than 450,000 other evacuees from quake and tsunami-hit areas in the northeast of the main island Honshu.

Some workers showed up on Monday at a factory in Kuji even though it had been destroyed. Asked why he was there, a young worker smoking a cigarette outside the skeletal remains said: "Because it's a work day."

Thousands spent another freezing night huddled in blankets over heaters in emergency shelters along the northeastern coast, a scene of devastation after the quake sent a 10-metre (33-foot) wave surging through towns and cities in the Miyagi region, including its main coastal city of Sendai .

ECONOMIC IMPACT

As the country returned to work on Monday, markets began estimating the huge economic cost, with Japanese stocks plunging over 6 percent and the yen falling against the dollar.

Hirohichi Shirakawa, chief economist for Japan at Credit Suisse said in a note to clients that the economic loss will likely be around 14-15 trillion yen (\$171-183 billion) just to the region hit by the quake and tsunami.

Even that would put it above the commonly accepted cost of the 1995 Kobe quake which killed 6,000 people.

The earthquake has forced many firms to suspend production and shares in some of Japan's biggest companies tumbled on Monday, with Toyota Corp dropping 7.5 percent . Shares in Australian-listed uranium miners also dived.

"When we talk about natural disasters, we tend to see an initial sharp drop in production ... then you tend to have a V-shaped rebound. But initially everyone underestimates the damage," said Michala Marcussen, head of global economics at Societe Generale.

Risk modelling company AIR Worldwide said insured losses from the earthquake could reach nearly \$35 billion.

The Bank of Japan offered a combined 15 trillion yen (\$183 billion) to the banking system earlier in the day to soothe market jitters.

Get a Quote

Browse Companies

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9



Home | News | Markets | Personal Finance | Mutual Funds | Infotech | Jobs | Opinion | Features | Videos | My Portfolio

Other Times Group news sites

Times of India | Mumbai Mirror
Times Now | Indiatimes

Living and entertainment

Timescity | iDiva | Bollywood | Zoom

Networking

itimes | Dating & Chat | Email

Hot on the Web

Hotklix | Restaurants in Mumbai
Buy Mobiles | Send Flowers to India
A Day In The Life of India
Assembly Elections 2011

Services

Book print ads | Online shopping | Business solutions | Book domains | Web hosting
Business email | Free SMS | Free email | Website design | CRM | Tenders | Remit
Cheap air tickets | Matrimonial | Ringtones | Astrology | Jobs | Property | Buy car
Bikes in India

