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Disaster in Japan: Latest developments, March 21

Posted by CBSNews.com staff



In this photo released by Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), gray smoke rises from Unit 3 of the tsunami-stricken Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant in Okumamachi, Fukushima Prefecture, Japan, March 21, 2011.

(Credit: AP/Tepeco)

Updated 8:23 p.m. ET:

- The Defense Department was considering whether to pull out all American military personnel and their families from the areas of Japan threatened by radiation exposure Mon. night after the departure of nuclear-powered aircraft carrier earlier in the day, [CBS News national security correspondent David Martin reports](#).

- Japanese government orders Fukushima and three other prefectures to suspend shipments of spinach and another leafy green vegetable after radiation levels surpassing legal limit were detected, [reports Kyodo news agency](#).
- Japan's national police said Monday that the death toll from the devastating earthquake and tsunami which ravaged the nation's northeast would likely exceed 18,000. The agency has recorded 8,805 deaths so far, while 12,664 people are listed as missing. It is possible those two lists have some overlap, and that unidentified bodies in the tally of deaths may match names on the missing list once their identities are confirmed.

More than 2,600 people are listed as injured and some 319,000 remain displaced in around 2,100 locations.

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- A 24-year-old American teacher's body has been found, bringing a tragic end to the [weeklong search](#) of a family that believed she might still be alive.

Taylor Anderson's family said that the U.S. Embassy in Japan informed them Monday of the discovery of her body.

Jean Anderson said her daughter was last seen after the earthquake riding her bike away from an Ishinomaki elementary school after making sure parents picked up their children. A tsunami struck shortly after the earthquake.

- A top official at the U.S. nuclear regulatory commission [said that the situation at the stricken Fukushima plant is stabilizing](#). Dr. William Borchardt, operations executive director for the NRC said that the imminent restoration of power to the Fukushima's reactors is "perhaps the first optimistic sign that we have that things could be turning around." He noted that the situation involving volatile spent fuel pools is stabilizing and that cooling water is being injected in to reactors 1, 2, and 3.

Borchardt was addressing the commission regarding a major short and long-term review of U.S. nuclear safety in light of the Japanese disaster.

TEPCO said late Monday that Units 1-4 were all continuing their "cold shutdowns," had stable water levels and showed no signs of leaking cooling water into their reactor containment vessels.

- The nuclear crisis has exposed huge weaknesses in how the world deals with such disasters, the United Nations' nuclear chief said Monday, urging changes in emergency responses worldwide.

Yukiya Amano, head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, said the situation at Fukushima seems to be improving, but acknowledged concerns that IAEA nuclear safety standards are voluntary and out of date.

- The carrier USS George Washington has [left the naval facility at Yokosuka, south of Tokyo, where it was undergoing repairs and potassium iodide pills have been distributed to sailors](#) and families remaining at the naval base and at the Atsugi Naval Air Facility.

Both actions are a response to a predicted shift in the winds, bringing increased radiation to the U.S. bases, reports CBS News correspondent David Martin. A Navy press release said that the George Washington got underway to maintain its long term readiness -- a euphemism, Martin reports, for saying that if it remained in Yokosuka it would become contaminated and take forever to be decontaminated.

- [The New York Times reports](#) that the effort to get power reconnected to the heavily-damaged Reactor No. 2 at the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant hit a snag on Monday. Citing Japan's nuclear safety agency, the Times reported that after a power supply cable was successfully connected to the reactor, workers determined there was still insufficient energy to power the reactor's cooling and pressure control systems -- vital equipment to bring the situation at Fukushima under control. The issue could take 2 to 3 days to resolve, according to the report.
- A plant spokesman says workers were evacuated from the nuclear complex after gray smoke was seen rising from one of its reactors. Tokyo Electric Power Co. spokesman Hiroshi Aizawa said the company was investigating after the smoke was seen rising from the spent fuel storage pool of Unit 3. Japan's national broadcaster NHK reports that the smoke subsided about two hours after it first appeared and that only crews working specifically on reactor 3 were ever forced to leave on Monday.

A spokesman for Japan's nuclear agency said that the white smoke seen rise above Unit 2 Monday is an indication that the water is evaporating out of the spent fuel container. They also found that the motors need to be repaired before further restoration work can resume on Unit 2, NHK reports.

TEPCO vice chairman Sakae Muto apologized to the public at a press conference Monday evening in Tokyo. When asked about TEPCO's plan for disabling the reactors at Fukushima, Muto responded by saying that the TEPCO's focus at this time is on the restoration efforts to stabilize Fukushima plant and refrained from commenting on the issue. But he did not downplay the gravity of the situation.

- In a report nine days before the earthquake and tsunami, Japan's nuclear safety agency criticized the plant operator for repeatedly failing to make inspections of critical equipment.

The Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency cited Tokyo Electric Power Co. for ignoring inspection schedules and failing to examine 33 pieces of equipment at the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear plant.

Among the machinery the utility missed were parts crucial to the cooling systems needed to keep Fukushima's six nuclear reactors and their fuel storage pools from overheating: emergency diesel generators in Unit 3, pumps for reactors in Units 1 and 2 and generator equipment for Unit 4.

- Workers were able to connect newly-laid power supply cables to all of the Fukushima plant's reactor's Monday -- including the most heavily-damaged Units 3 and 4. Plant officials have yet to try to switch back on the primary cooling systems at the plant, and because the components themselves may have been damaged in the earthquake and tsunami, it is unclear whether they will function as intended when power is restored.

News from the weekend:

- [The Chronicle of Philanthropy](#) reports that American donors have raised over \$105 million for the Japan quake relief effort thus far. The Chronicle's report states: "The rate of donations is slower than after last year's earthquake in Haiti and after 2005's Hurricane Katrina. Seven days after the disaster in Haiti, donors had contributed more than \$275 million, and six days after Katrina they had given more than \$457 million."
- The World Bank says the quake, tsunami and nuclear crisis caused up to \$235 billion in damage. The cost to private insurers will be up to \$33 billion and the government will spend \$12 billion on reconstruction in the current national budget and much more later.
- Japanese people heartened by the miracle rescue of an 80-year-old woman and her grandson rescued from the rubble 9 days after the Japan earthquake and tsunami

- "60 Minutes" correspondent Scott Pelley [reports from the disaster zone in Japan.](#)



In this image taken from footage released by the Japan Defense Ministry, Japan Self-Defense Forces personnel talk before starting to spray water toward the Unit 3 of the troubled Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear complex, Okumamachi, northeastern Japan, on Friday, March 18, 2011. (Credit: AP)

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