



Drumbeat: March 12, 2011

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[Partial meltdown likely under way at power plant, Japanese official says](#)

A partial meltdown is likely under way at one nuclear power plant affected by Friday's earthquake, according to Japan's top government official, the Associated Press reports.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano said radiation at the plant in Fukushima was briefly above legal limits but has declined significantly.

Tokyo Electric Power Co., owner of two heavily damaged nuclear power complexes near the center of Friday's earthquake, told Japanese regulators earlier Sunday that it faced a new emergency at one of its 10 reactors, even as it struggled to bring several others under control.

[Official: 'We see the possibility of a meltdown'](#)

Tokyo (CNN) -- A meltdown may be under way at one of Fukushima Daiichi's nuclear power reactors in northern Japan, an official with Japan's Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency told CNN Sunday.

"There is a possibility, we see the possibility of a meltdown," said Toshihiro Bannai, director of the agency's international affairs office, in a telephone interview from the agency's headquarters in Tokyo. "At this point, we have still not confirmed that there is an actual meltdown, but there is a possibility."

Though he said engineers have been unable to get close enough to the core to know what's going on, he based his conclusion on the fact that they measured radioactive cesium and radioactive iodine in the air Saturday night.

[Meltdown Caused Nuke Plant Explosion: Safety Body](#)

TOKYO (Nikkei)--The Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) said Saturday afternoon the explosion at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant could only have been caused by a meltdown of the reactor core.

The same day, Tokyo Electric Power Co. (9501), which runs the plant, began to flood the damaged reactor with seawater to cool it down, resorting to measures that could rust the reactor and force the utility to scrap it.

Cesium and iodine, by-products of nuclear fission, were detected around the plant, which would make the explosion the worst accident in the roughly 50-year history of Japanese nuclear power generation.

[In Japan plant, frantic efforts to avoid meltdown](#)

TOKYO (AP) — Inside the troubled nuclear power plant, officials knew the risks were high when they decided to vent radioactive steam from a severely overheated reactor vessel. They knew a hydrogen explosion could occur, and it did. The decision still trumped the worst-case alternative — total nuclear meltdown.

At least for the time being.

[Emergency at second nuclear reactor in Japan; meltdown threat looms](#)

TOKYO — Japan's nuclear safety agency is reporting an emergency at a second reactor in the same complex where an explosion had occurred earlier.

[Japan quake: Exodus from around Fukushima nuclear plant](#)

An estimated 170,000 people have been evacuated from the area around a quake-damaged nuclear power station in north-east Japan that was hit by an explosion, the UN atomic watchdog says.

[Japan Fukushima nuclear plant faces new reactor problem](#)

(Reuters) - A quake-hit Japanese nuclear plant reeling from an explosion at one of its reactors has also lost its emergency cooling system at another reactor, Japan's nuclear power safety agency said on Sunday.

The emergency cooling system is no longer functioning at the No.3 reactor at Tokyo Electric Power Co's Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power facility, requiring the facility to urgently secure a means to supply water to the reactor, an official of the Japan Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency told a news conference.

[Q&A: What caused the blast at nuclear plant in Japan, and why do officials fear a meltdown?](#)

The cause of the explosion isn't yet clear, but the nuclear plant has lost the ability to cool its hot uranium fuel. The containment vessel hasn't been breached but officials fear a core meltdown. An untested method to cool the core before that happens is planned.

[Q&A: What has quake done to Japanese nuclear reactors?](#)

(CNN) -- What kind of nuclear reactor is involved?

The reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi plant are boiling water reactors. The reactor which saw the explosion is Fukushima Daiichi 1. It was connected to the grid in November 1970, making it about 40 years old. There are six reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi site, of which unit 1 is the oldest, according to the World Nuclear Association.

[Russia to boost energy supplies to Japan](#)

Earthquake-stricken Japan asked Russia on Saturday to increase energy supplies and Moscow is ready to deliver up to 150,000 tons of liquefied natural gas and increase gas supplies, Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin said.

Sechin said Russia's SUEK and Mechel companies would meet next week to consider the possibility of boosting coal supplies by 3-4 million tons.

Additional electricity could also be supplied via the existing underwater cable, he said.

[Japan nuclear plant, Libya show challenge of 'energy security'](#)

One year in the 1970s saw the Three Mile Island nuclear accident and a revolution in Iran that raised fresh worries about energy policy. Now, news events of 2011 are stirring similar questions about energy supplies for the US and the world.

Much has changed in those 30-plus years since 1979, but one constant is that "energy security" remains a vitally important but difficult goal.

In recent weeks, it's been events in oil-producing Arab nations – notably fighting in Libya – that have brought this point home on Main Street America and elsewhere. But Friday's destructive earthquake in Japan could be a setback for one major oil alternative: nuclear power.

[Japan nuclear mishap 'among worst ever'](#)

AFP - A US nuclear expert says the accident at a Japanese nuclear reactor is one of the three worst in history, and could become a "complete disaster" if it goes to a full meltdown.

"This is going to go down in history as one of the three greatest nuclear incidents if it stops now," Joseph Cirincione, the head of the Ploughshares Fund, said in an interview on CNN on Saturday.

"If it continues, if they don't get control of this and ... we go from a partial meltdown of

the core to a full meltdown, this will be a complete disaster," he said.

[Japan rates quake less serious than 3 Mile Island, Chernobyl](#)

(Reuters) - A nuclear accident in Japan on Saturday rates as less serious than both the Three Mile Island accident in 1979 and the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster, Japan's nuclear safety agency said.

[Japan Nuclear Closures Could Have Oil, Gas Price Fallout](#)

The Japan earthquake has shut an estimated 6,800 megawatts of nuclear power generation, or 15%-20% of Japan's capacity, and while it isn't clear how long outages will last, there could be considerable fuel substitution, which in turn could drive up prices of alternative fuels, according to a Barclay Capital analysis published Saturday.

If the shuttered nuclear capacity was replaced only by additional fuel oil consumption, it would require an additional 238,000 barrels a day, it said.

[On the Brink of Meltdown: The Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant](#)

The devastating Japanese quake and its outcome could generate a political tsunami here in the United States.

[Japan's Nuclear Crisis May Resonate in the U.S.](#)

The crisis at the Fukushima and Daini nuclear plants in Japan comes at a sensitive time for an industry that's been looking for new life in the United States. There's been renewed interest in building nuclear plants – including from the Obama administration – given both oil prices and concerns about the environmental impacts of burning fossil fuels. But public safety concerns remain a strong element of the discussion.

[Anti-nuclear group in Japan says emergency was predicted](#)

An anti-nuclear group in Japan said Saturday that it had warned of just the kind of emergency occurring at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

"This could and should have been predicted," said a statement from spokesman Philip White of the Citizens' Nuclear Information Center.

[Legal restraints curb IAEA's role in Japan's reactor drama](#)

Vienna - The International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) response to the Japanese nuclear plant explosion on Saturday exposed the limited role that the Vienna-based body can play in the face of such accidents.

For more than four hours, the IAEA was unable to confirm the blast at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant, which was damaged in Friday's earthquake. When the confirmation came, the organization still had no details on the status of the reactor core or possible leaks of radiation.

[Nuclear agency posting updates on Japan plants on Facebook](#)

The International Atomic Energy Agency is providing updates on the damaged Japanese nuclear plants, Fukushima Daiichi and Fukushima Daini, on its Facebook page.

[Mexico Closes Cabo San Lucas Pacific Coast Port Amid Tsunami](#)

Mexico closed the port of San Lucas on the Pacific Coast because of the widespread tsunami warning after Japan was hit by its strongest earthquake on record.

Two other ports -- Salina Cruz and Chiapas -- were shut for bad weather unrelated to the temblor, the Merchant Marine said today in a bulletin on its website.

[Fuel shortage looms for oil-rich Libya](#)

A lack of refined gasoline could affect the outcome of fighting between rebels and Moammar Kadafi's forces. The opposition control the oil-rich east, but the government has cash for imports.

[Yemen disputes claims of live ammunition fire](#)

(CNN) -- Security forces in restive Yemen fired live ammunition during protests Saturday in Change Square outside Sanaa University, witnesses claimed.

But a government source knocked down these accounts, asserting that the police used only water cannon and tear gas to disperse crowds and third-party provocateurs fired at the people.

[Food Not Facebook](#)

Two facts are often overlooked by pundits attributing North African social unrest to a social media campaign. First, according to the CIA World Fact Book, less than 10% of the combined populations of Algeria, Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia have internet access. Second,

the literacy rate across these four countries averages approximately 68% of the adult population. Collectively, these penetration rates across the populations mentioned do not translate into the levels of protest seen in the streets of Algeria, Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia. Something more was at work. Both weather and the proceeding global financial crisis left these nations with a shortage of fundamental public resources. Unstable and sky-rocketing food prices were, in our opinion, the spark to a powder-keg situation already brewing in the region.

[Lifting Administration's De Facto Moratorium on Gulf Oil Exploration Would Ease President's Self-imposed Energy Crisis](#)

"President Obama's rhetoric will not bring down the price of gas, will not make us less reliant on unstable regimes and will not generate new jobs in the energy sector. The only immediate solution to the administration's self-imposed energy crisis is to lift the de facto moratorium on offshore drilling in the Gulf of Mexico," said Jim Adams, president and CEO of the Offshore Marine Service Association (OMSA).

[Long-term guidelines to ensure US energy security](#)

The Obama Administration and numerous Congressional Democrats are pondering the idea of releasing oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve to combat current rising energy prices. While the Administration enters a legal battle to defend its self-imposed deepwater drilling moratorium, the idea of tapping our strategic petroleum reserve is just another shortsighted measure that will continue and exacerbate our nation's looming energy crisis.

[Population explosion, main cause of socio-economic problems](#)

LAHORE (APP): Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Dr Firdous Ashiq Awan said on Saturday that population explosion and lack of long-term planning were the major causes of all socio-economic challenges being faced by the country. Addressing a seminar on 'Energy Crisis and Role of Media' at Hameed Nizami Press Institute of Pakistan, she said, "Unfortunately no attention was given towards checking fast growing population during the last 63 years which led to multiplication of problems and squeezing of resources."

[On Obama's trip to Chile, he should bring "la buena energía"](#)

President Obama has a scheduled trip to Chile later this month. And in the agenda, clean energy should be a top priority. Chile is a small country, another world away, but it is on the precipice of an energy policy disaster and its success—or failure—in confronting its energy challenges will likely set a course for South America.

[Underground coal gasification: An option indeed](#)

With the increase in population, demand for energy will also grow sharply besides the present gap between demand and supply. The most eminent challenge is that expected demand for electricity during the coming decades would require doubling the power generation capacity in the country. Most of the countries are heavily dependent on coal while Bangladesh, totally dependent on natural gas, is an exception to the case. Unutilised coal and underground coal gasification could be an open option to resolve the country's not only the present short fall but also to fulfill future demand.

[Censored scientists, dirty politics and the nuclear distraction](#)

My first impression is to wonder why someone as smart as Jim Hansen would fall for something that so clearly sounds too good to be true. Thousands of years of nearly free energy that's also clean and perfectly safe? Isn't that essentially the promise of zero-point energy, or cold fusion, or the hydrogen economy or any number of perpetual-motion schemes you can find online that seem much closer to magic than science?

[Japanese official says pumping system caused nuclear plant blast](#)

(CNN) -- An explosion at an earthquake-damaged nuclear plant was not caused by damage to the nuclear reactor but by a pumping system that failed as crews tried to bring the reactor's temperature down, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano said Saturday.

The next step for workers at the Fukushima Daiichi plant will be to flood the reactor containment structure with sea water to bring the reactor's temperature down to safe levels, he said. The effort is expected to take two days.

[Oil Caps Its First Weekly Decline in a Month as Japan Quake Shuts Plants](#)

Crude oil fell in New York, capping the first weekly drop in a month, after Japan's strongest earthquake on record shut refineries and dissidents in Saudi Arabia failed to stage planned protests.

[Saudi King Counters Dissent With \\$36 Billion as Clerics Scold Protesters](#)

As unrest escalated across the Middle East, activists in Saudi Arabia demanded a political voice as well. Rather than promises of democracy, they got a \$36 billion handout and a slap down from Islamic clerics.

[Saudi Activists Fail to Gather Amid Heavy Police Presence](#)

Protesters in Saudi Arabia stayed away from a so-called Day of Rage after police were deployed in force to deter political activists.

[Qaddafi's Warplane, Firepower Advantages Put Libyan Rebels on Defensive](#)

Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi strengthened his control in and around the capital, Tripoli, as his forces fought rebels reported to be still dug in at oil installations in Ras Lanuf.

Pro-Qaddafi supporters were shown on state television celebrating in the main square of Zawiyah, a coastal city 30 miles (50 kilometers) west of Tripoli where rebels yielded this week after attacks by Qaddafi's forces. The government brought foreign journalists to the city yesterday to discredit rebel claims that fighting was continuing.

[Libyan rebels lose oil port, but vow to regroup](#)

AJDABIYA, Libya — Rebels fighting to oust Moammar Gadhafi conceded Saturday that the regime had retaken a key oil port city and refinery and pushed the front line farther east, but they defiantly vowed to fight back as government forces gain strength.

[BHP Billiton Wins Second Deep-Water Drilling Permit in U.S. Since BP Spill](#)

BHP Billiton Ltd. won the second U.S. deep-water permit to drill in the Gulf of Mexico since BP Plc's oil spill last year, after lawmakers criticized the Obama administration for delaying domestic exploration.

[S.Korea set to win major UAE oil field deal -sources](#)

ABU DHABI (Reuters) - South Korea is likely to secure a major oil field development contract in the United Arab Emirates as the Asian state pushes to meet its long-term energy needs, sources familiar with the matter said on Saturday.

[Sinopec to Shut Luoyang Plant in September for Maintenance, Reducing Sales](#)

China Petroleum & Chemical Corp. (600028), the nation's biggest fuel supplier, plans to shut its 160,000-barrel-a-day refinery in Luoyang city in central China in September for maintenance, said the head of the plant.

[Heating oil use falls as prices, irritation rise](#)

PORTLAND, Maine -- No longer are Tom Wright's heating costs tied to events a world away over which he has no control. Faced with a \$10,000 heating bill, he got rid of his oil furnace and brought in a wood pellet stove to heat his home and office.

Oil and gasoline prices are sky-high, and heating oil use is tumbling as people find

alternative ways to stay warm -- evidence that Americans' efforts to wean themselves off oil can bear fruit.

[Murkowski: 5 ways to open the U.S. oil spigot](#)

Despite tremendous oil reserves — offshore, in Alaska and in the Rocky Mountain West — many of our lands have been locked up, and many of our most promising opportunities have been put out of reach.

This is a clear failure of government. The American people expect their representatives to take an honest look at where increased production is possible; how it can protect against higher prices and supply disruptions; and what it will do to increase our security, restore our trade balance, generate government revenues and create jobs. When we import oil, we export those benefits.

[Solar Stocks Fall as Analysts Predict Oversupply, Lower Prices for Panels](#)

Solar energy stocks fell today as analysts said that cuts to incentive programs in Europe may drive down prices and demand for panels that convert sunlight into electricity.

[Greek Solar Power Capacity May Double After Permit Process Streamlined](#)

Greek solar-power developers will double the pace of installations this year after a new law streamlined procedures to get permits, the industry's lobby group said.

[Zero-emission cars get the green light](#)

If the predictions are right, the next few years will see a revolution in the motoring industry as tens of thousands of zero-emission electric vehicles hit the roads.

[Top 10 list of most fuel-efficient cars: What's the best buy?](#)

Gas prices rose again this week, the summer driving season is around the corner and they are demonstrating today in Saudi Arabia.

So before gas hits \$5 a gallon, we thought it would be a good day to look at the Top 10 most fuel-efficient rides you can buy -- based on EPA combined mileage ratings that better reflect what you'll average per year -- and the cost to drive them.

[Uncertainty over food supply is hard to swallow](#)

The near-daily toppling of governments in the Arab world is rendering moot all arguments about whether peak oil is 10, 30 or 50 years away. Gas prices are up and still rising, and there is no guarantee they will come back down. More certain is that the governments that supplant the regimes that the West supported all those years to ensure a steady supply of cheap oil will not be nearly as easygoing as their predecessors.

Fuel is a big part of the cost of growing and transporting food and a major input into fertilizer manufacturing.

[Democrats Cry Foul Over GOP's Attempts to Tie Fuel Prices to EPA](#)

House Republicans' move to join the two most politically volatile threads in the Washington, D.C., energy debate -- gas prices and U.S. EPA rules -- sparked Democratic charges of deception yesterday and silence so far from the Obama administration.

Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) amplified the GOP gambit as he laid out a new project, dubbed the American Energy Initiative, calling for more domestic fossil-fuel production, new nuclear power plants and an end to EPA's authority over greenhouse gases. While the Republican message had percolated all week, Boehner's decision to spotlight the anti-EPA bill now sailing through the House Energy and Commerce Committee gave the gas-price charge a far broader platform.

[China Will Hold Local Governments More Responsible in Reducing Pollution](#)

China wants local governments to be more responsible for environmental protection as the world's fastest-growing major economy seeks to reduce pollution, said Zhang Lijun, vice minister for environmental protection.

[Northeast Carbon Dioxide Permits Auctioned for \\$1.89 Each, Minimum Bid](#)

Carbon-dioxide permits in the U.S. Northeast sold at auction this week for \$1.89 each, the minimum allowable bid, the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative said on its website.

[Hearing Is Set in Climate Fraud Case](#)

A nearly yearlong effort by Attorney General Kenneth T. Cuccinelli II of Virginia to force the University of Virginia to turn over the documents of a prominent climatologist is headed to the state's Supreme Court.



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