

Fukushima reactor 'ice wall' nearly finished

Tokyo

Fukushima's operator yesterday started freezing the last section of a \$320 million ice wall designed to combat widespread water contamination at the site of the worst nuclear accident in a generation.

Tokyo Electric Power (TEPCO) began pumping coolant into the remaining seven metres (23 feet) of its 1.5-kilometre underground wall which encircles the four reactors along Japan's northeast coast.

Underground pipes



Workers pouring coolant to freeze the underground ice wall around the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plants in Okuma, Fukushima

circulate the coolant and freeze

The 30-metre deep wall is

designed to block underground water from nearby mountains from flowing into the shattered

complex and then seeping into the Pacific.

It is reportedly expected to

take more than two months until the wall is completely frozen.

The huge utility has been building the barrier since March 2016 with the government picking up its 34.5 billion yen (\$320 million) price tag.

Even now, with the ice wall almost complete, about 140 tonnes of underground water flows into the plant daily, forcing the company to pump it out and store it in on-site tanks.

"When the ice wall is completed, we estimate that

the amount of underground water flowing into the complex will be less than 100 tonnes," a company spokesman said.

But some experts have cast doubt on the ice wall, and the country's Nuclear Regulation Authority said it has not yet done an independent analysis.

"We doubt the ice wall is going to be as effective as TEPCO claims it will be," said an NRA official who spoke on condition of anonymity.

"We're going to monitor its progress after it is finished to check the impact."

Egypt arrests suspected organ traders



Representational image

Kabul

Egyptian authorities have arrested 12 people including doctors and nurses suspected of belonging to a "large criminal network specialised in trading human organs", the interior ministry said Tuesday.

Hundreds of poor Egyptians sell their kidneys and livers each year to be able to buy food or pay off debts, according to the United Nations.

The network "agreed with Egyptians to transfer some of their organs to foreign patients in exchange for large

sums of money, exploiting people's financial need," the interior ministry said.

Among those arrested were three doctors, four nurses, three hospital workers and two agents, it said in a statement.

Some were arrested "while they were carrying out an operation to remove the kidneys and part of the liver of a citizen in a private hospital" in Giza province, part of Greater Cairo.

The man had sold the organs for \$10,000 (8,500 euros). Those operating on

him were planning to implant the organs in a patient, the ministry said.

It did not give further details on the man's condition or say when the arrests took place, but added that the hospital had been closed pending an investigation.

The World Health Organization in 2010 ranked Egypt among the top five countries in the world trading illegally in organs.

Egypt's parliament passed a law that year banning commercial trade in organs as well as transplants between Egyptians and foreigners,

except between husbands and wives.

The law aimed to regulate organ transplants and curb illegal trafficking and medical tourism for such operations.

In 2012, then-United Nations refugee agency chief Antonio Guterres warned that migrants in Egypt's Sinai peninsula were being killed for their organs.

Authorities in December arrested 25 people, including doctors and university professors, suspected of being part of an organ trading network. (AFP)

US teen pleads guilty to internet villain-inspired attack

Chicago

One of two girls accused with stabbing a friend inspired by a fictitious internet character pleaded guilty to a reduced attempted homicide charge Monday in a Wisconsin court.

Anissa Weier, who is now 15 but was 12 years old at the time of the 2014 crime, agreed to plea to a lesser charge of second-degree homicide as party to a crime, with use of a deadly weapon.

She originally faced first-degree intentional homicide. She will stand trial next month

to determine if she is legally responsible considering her mental health condition.

She told the court she participated in the attack, because she feared the internet character Slender Man -- a villain featured on a horror website -- would otherwise hurt her and her family, according to US media.

Both she and her alleged accomplice Morgan Geyser are accused of stabbing their friend Payton Leutner 19 times at a park. A bicyclist found Leutner and helped her get to a hospital.

Chile Constitutional court clears way to ease abortion ban

Santiago

Chile's Constitutional Court on Monday approved a bill to decriminalize abortion in certain cases, a move decried by conservative opponents but hailed by Socialist President Michelle Bachelet as a victory for women's rights.

The bill will allow abortion in cases of rape, threat to the mother's life or deadly birth defects.

Judges voted by six to four to dismiss challenges brought by conservative parties opposed to the reform, the court's

secretary-general Rodrigo Pica told a news conference.

The bill can now be signed into law by the socialist president, who launched the reform in 2015.

Citizens for and against the reform staged rowdy demonstrations near the court during its deliberations.

Supporters of the bill celebrated outside the court after the ruling, yelling their thanks to Bachelet.

Rival demonstrators shouted curses, calling those behind the reform "murderers."

Alleged Barcelona killer was 'a normal factory worker'

Ripoll

The alleged Barcelona attacker who was killed Monday grew up in a small Catalan town where he seemed "nicely integrated" like his younger brother who also died as part of the same terror cell, residents said.

Younes Abouyaaqoub, a 22-year-old Moroccan, was shot by police not far from Barcelona in northeastern Spain after a four-day manhunt

for the man who allegedly drove a van through crowds in the popular Mediterranean city, killing 13.

He didn't stop there, fleeing his vehicle on foot after Thursday's attack, hijacking a car and stabbing its driver to make his getaway.

"I'm happy and sad all at once," Hassan Azzidi, a Moroccan factory worker, said in the Catalan town of Ripoll where many members of the

terror cell that planned the Barcelona attack and another car rampage in the seaside resort of Cambrils came from.

"This had to end, because we're living as if in a war, but at the same time, someone brainwashed such a young boy.

"Younes lived normally, he worked in a factory, he had everything... I don't know how they manage to eat their brains."

Police suspect an imam of

radicalising Abouyaaqoub, his younger brother Houssein and nine other young men.

The imam Abdelbaki Es Satty died in an explosion believed to have been accidentally detonated by the suspects themselves in their bomb factory in the seaside town of Alcanar, also in Catalonia.

Other suspects have either been killed by police or detained.



Spanish police members stand past the van of the funeral services carrying the body of Moroccan suspect Younes Abouyaaqoub