Angry public demands more info

FUKUSHIMA (Kyodo) People in Fukushima Prefecture expressed concern and rage Wednesday as radioactivity readings remained high around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant and kept them on high alert.

"Is the government and Tokyo Electric Power Co. giving us the whole story?" asked Atsushi Chiba, a 40-year-old owner of a barbershop in Iwaki, 50 km from ground zero.

A new fire was observed Wednesday at the No. 4 reactor and white smoke was visible coming out of the No. 3 reactor later in the day. Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano said the vapor "is likely to be radioactive and leaking from the containment vessel."

Angered by the television news footage, Chiba said he had given up leaving his shop "because there isn't enough gas in the car."

"All the children have disappeared from the streets in fear of the radioactivity," he added.

A 75-year-old in Tamura, about 75 km from the plant, echoed Chiba's concern. The No. 4 reactor appears to be "wiped out," said the man, who asked to remain anonymous. "The prime minister's office and Tepco keep giving us statistics, but it's dubious how accurate they are, considering that no one is probably able to get in there."

Approximately 50 residents from Naraha taking refuge at a junior high school in Iwaki also expressed anxiety about the evacuation orders, questioning when they will be able to return home and wondering how farm products will be affected by radioactive rain.

"Explanations by the government and Tepco are very vague. They only raise the anxiety among us evacuees," said Takeshi Seya, a 30-year-old working in Naraha.

Takano Hospital in Hirono, which is mostly within the designated 20-km radius for evacuation, had more than 100 stranded patients. Most are elderly and some are bedridden, according to the hospital.

"Because of the blackout, we are not able to use our phones, and the cold temperature is taking a toll on them. We are making requests to the local government to seek a different shelter (for the patients), but that isn't going easy," a Hirono city official said.

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