

## JAPAN NUCLEAR REACTOR SHUTTERED FOR SAFETY WORK

**TOKYO:** A reactor at the centre of Japan's national debate over nuclear power was halted yesterday under stricter post-Fukushima safety standards, as Tokyo struggles to bring back atomic energy.

Utility Kyushu Electric is shutting down the No. 1 reactor at its Sendai plant in southern Kagoshima for a few months of inspections and maintenance, leaving Japan with just two operating reactors. But there is speculation that the reactor's safety work could drag on longer.

Yesterday's shutdown follows

demands from the region's top politician that Kyushu Electric conduct extra safety inspections at its two operating reactors in the Sendai plant after deadly quakes hammered a neighboring prefecture in April.

Last month, the company refused governor Satoshi Mitazono's demands to immediately shut down the reactors over safety concerns. But it agreed to what it called "special inspections" in addition to regular maintenance work. Sendai's No. 2 reactor will be shut down for a similar review starting in December.

Dozens of reactors were switched off in the wake of the March 2011 Fukushima accident, the worst nuclear disaster in a generation. Anti-atomic sentiment still runs high five years later, challenging a push by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and utility companies to switch Japan's stable of reactors back on.

The catastrophe forced resource-poor Japan to turn to expensive fossil fuels to plug its energy gap, but fears about the safety of nuclear power and radiation exposure linger. The two Sendai reactors were restarted last year

under new safety regulations brought in after Fukushima, where reactors went into meltdown in March 2011 after a huge earthquake and tsunami.

Another reactor has been restarted at the Ikata plant in western Japan. Opposition to nuclear power has seen communities across the country file lawsuits to prevent restarts, including the Sendai plant. The residents argued that the plant's operator underestimated the scale of potential earthquakes and volcanic eruptions that could hit the region. A court rejected their argument and ordered restarts. — AFP

## INDONESIA PROSECUTORS SEEK 20 YEARS IN COFFEE POISONING CASE

**JAKARTA:** Indonesian prosecutors said they are seeking a 20-year jail term for a woman charged with murdering her college friend by poisoning her coffee.

Jessica Kumala Wongso, a resident of Australia, is accused of the murder of Wayan Mirna Salihin at a Jakarta cafe in early January. The case has grabbed widespread media attention in Indonesia and neighbouring Australia, with the cafe turning into a tourist spot and coffee products being named after Wongso. Weekly court hearings are televised live.

President Joko Widodo's administration said in June Wongso would not be executed. The deal was made with Australia in order for Australian police to assist in the investigation. "The public prosecutor in this case demands the panel of judges ... sentence the defendant Jessica Kumala Wongso to 20 years in prison," prosecutor Melanie Wuwung said at the court hearing in Jakarta late Wednesday.

Wongso's lawyers say there is no evidence that she poisoned her friend's coffee. "There is no CCTV footage," lawyer Otto Hasibuan said. "What has been proven by prosecutors is only a game of words."

Prosecutors have no direct evidence or witnesses who have seen the incident." — Reuters

## HONG KONG JAILS PROTESTER OVER ANTI-CHINA RIOTS

**HONG KONG:** A Hong Kong court jailed a protester yesterday in the first sentence handed down over a riot that erupted in February and saw violent clashes in the city fuelled by anti-China sentiment.

The violence erupted after officials tried to clear illegal street hawkers from a busy commercial neighborhood during Chinese new year, with police firing warning shots into the air.

Beijing officials blamed the clashes, which saw some 30 people arrested and charged with rioting, on "radical separatists". Some participants were from "localist" groups pushing for more freedom for the semi-autonomous city or even a split from Beijing.

A magistrates' court sentenced Chan Pak-yeung, 31, an active member and online radio presenter for the localist political party Civic Passion, to nine months in prison for resisting and assaulting police, the party said.

The court had heard that Chan hurled plastic water bottles at police and had kicked officers who tried to arrest him, news reports said. But Civic Passion questioned the evidence against Chan after the ruling. "This must be political prosecution," said the party's vice chairman Alvin Cheng.

Cheng said he was worried that there would be more jail sentences over the riots. Tensions are high in the city, which is ruled under a "one country, two systems" deal set up when it was handed back to China by Britain in 1997.

That agreement guarantees Hong Kong's freedoms and way of life for 50 years, but there are growing concerns that Beijing is increasing its influence. Hong Kong saw mass pro-democracy rallies calling for fully free elections erupt in 2014, but anger built up after authorities cleared protest sites and gave no concessions over political reform. — AFP



SEPADANG, MALAYSIA: Edward Leaney, front left, and Jack Walker, front right, leave the Sepang Magistrate yesterday. — AP

## MALAYSIAN COURT LETS OFF 'BUDGIE 9' WHO PARTIED IN SWIMSUITS DETAINED SINCE SUNDAY

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Nine Australians who spent four nights in police detention after stripping down to skimpy swimsuits printed with the Malaysian flag at that nation's Formula One Grand Prix walked free yesterday without a conviction after pleading guilty to causing a public nuisance and apologizing.

The nine were detained since Sunday after they partied in their swimwear and drank beer from shoes in full view of thousands of spectators at the Sepang track after Australian driver Daniel Ricciardo won the race.

Australian media dubbed them the Budgie Nine. A budgerigar is an Australian parrot that is a popular household pet and the Australians' swimwear is colloquially known as budgie smugglers. The name plays on nine Australians arrested in Indonesia for heroin trafficking in 2005 who became known as the Bali Nine. Their Australian families flew to Malaysia as

the police warned the friends faced potential two-year prison sentences.

Defense lawyer Muhammad Shafee Abdullah said the court accepted his argument that it was a trivial offense and that the nine, mostly dressed in suits in the court, were ignorant of the local culture and remorseful. He said one of them read out an apology to the court, admitting to an "error of judgment." Shafee said their actions were not illegal in most countries, including Australia. "We are sensitive about it, but they didn't know. They sincerely thought it was a respect and a celebration with Malaysians," Shafee said.

"The court accepted my mitigation that this was a trivial offense and under extenuating circumstances because they misunderstood the local culture. They have been admonished by the court and released without conviction," he added.

He said one of the men fainted in

court briefly due to dehydration. The nine, mostly Sydney University graduates in their 20s, left the court without speaking to reporters. The men included Jack Walker, an adviser to Australian Defense Industry Minister Chris Pyne.

His father John Walker said they were very thankful. "There's no charge, there's no fine and the boys apologized. They recognized what they did was unacceptable but they have been completely cleared and are free to travel and resume their lives," he said.

Ricciardo, the driver whose success inspired the Australians' beer-fueled revelry, described the incident as "pretty harmless." "I respect the laws of Malaysia, but beyond that I don't think they deserve any further punishment," Ricciardo told Sydney's The Daily Telegraph newspaper. "In Australia, it's a bit different, but I'm very sure they didn't intend to offend anyone," he said. — AP