

Japan's PM Abe visits Fukushima nuke plant in revival message

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Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visits Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant in Okuma. (AP)

Tokyo: Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Sunday visited the Fukushima nuclear plant, which sank into meltdowns after a tsunami eight years ago, in an effort to highlight revival and safety as the nation prepares to host the 2020 Olympics.

The visit by Abe, who last went to the Fukushima Dai-ichi plant five years ago, was seen as damage control after Yoshitaka Sakurada, a ruling party minister overseeing the Olympics, resigned for a remark appearing to belittle reconstruction in northeastern Japan. "Our basic policy is that every minister is a reconstruction minister," Abe said during his visit. "We reaffirmed our commitment to work for the revival of Fukushima and northeastern Japan."

Abe wore a business suit as he was shown around the plant "a contrast to the special head-to-toe suit and mask visitors had to wear five years ago, reflecting progress with the cleanup. He also visited a soccer facility called J-Village, which temporarily served as a place for workers dealing with the plant accident.

A giant tsunami in March 2011 set off meltdowns at three of Fukushima Dai-ichi's reactors, the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl. As many as 160,000 people evacuated the area, although some have since returned.

Earlier Sunday, Abe visited Okuma, one of two towns that house the plant, where an evacuation order was partially lifted earlier this month. The government has been carrying out decontamination efforts to lower radiation levels in the region.

The plant, operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co., is being decommissioned. The utility says that will take 30 to 40 years.

- AP