

From Agence Frances-Presse:

Japan warns Aum cult is regaining power

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TOKYO, Jan 11 (AFP) - Japan's Aum Supreme Truth sect, blamed for the 1995 nerve gas attack on the Tokyo subway, is regrouping and building up strength, a top government official warned Monday.

"Aum Shinrikyo is regaining power and is now two thirds of its former size," Chief Cabinet Secretary Hiromu Nonaka told reporters.

"We have to watch the cult carefully. In my opinion, it is regrettable the Antisubversive Activities Law was not applied," to the cult, he said.

The group escaped being outlawed in January 1997 because a legal panel ruled there was no reason to believe the cult could still be a threat to society.

The sect is accused of the March 1995 attack on Tokyo subways with a Nazi nerve agent that killed 12 and injured thousands. It is also blamed for another gassing attack in the central Japan city of Matsumoto in June 1994 that left seven people dead.

Tokyo police said Monday they issued an arrest warrant for an Aum follower, who is suspected of embezzling money from a foreign direct-marketing company.

Tomoyo Kobayashi, 35, a door-to-door saleswoman for the US firm Amway, is being sought on suspicion that she pocketed a total of about 1.86 million yen (17,000 dollars) in the last two years, police said.

Police searched the religious cult's new headquarters in Tokyo and seven other locations in connection with the case.