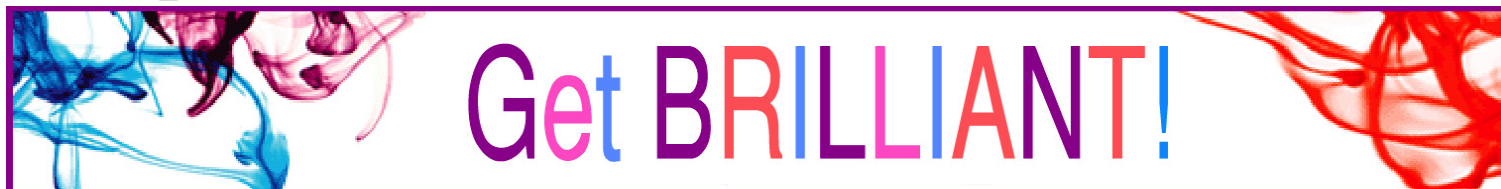


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## Japan sends vice minister to EU to confirm intention on ITER bid

(Kyodo) \_ The Japanese government on Tuesday dispatched Tetsuhisa Shirakawa, vice minister for education and science, to Brussels for final confirmation on whether or not the European Union has any intention of giving up its bid to have the world's first nuclear fusion reactor situated in France.

Shirakawa is expected to hold working-level discussions on the matter with a senior official in the European Union which has held firm in its intention to seek to host the multibillion dollar project to build the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor.

Japan is bidding to host the ITER in Rokkasho, Aomori Prefecture, while the European Union wants the reactor to be located in Cadarache, southern France.

Six-party ministerial negotiations on the site of the project are expected to be held at the end of June in Moscow but the negotiations are currently deadlocked.

Science Minister Nariaki Nakayama made a hasty decision to dispatch Shirakawa to assess the EU's intentions, especially concerning the financial burden for the construction of the reactor, after France rejected ratification of the EU Constitution in a referendum in May.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology said after the rejection that a question had now arisen over whether it was possible for the European Union to implement the Japan-EU agreement reached in early May on the conditions for hosting the construction of the reactor.

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Under the agreement, the host will shoulder half of the ITER construction costs amounting to 570 billion yen and the other party will host a facility to research materials for use at the ITER, and 46 billion yen, half of the expenses for the research facility, will be shouldered by the ITER host, sources familiar with the negotiations said earlier.

The Japanese government has considered the possibility of giving up its bid because of financial problems, but has put its final decision on hold due to strong opposition to



the idea from a group of ruling Liberal Democratic Party lawmakers promoting nuclear fusion energy and the Aomori prefectural government.

On Monday, Japanese government sources said that the Japanese government will decide possibly later this week whether to continue to stick to the bid.

The two sides are in a tug-of-war over the site selection, and are said to be seeking to reach a political resolution by the Group of Eight summit is held in Gleneagles, Scotland, in July.

The two sides are explaining about the items agreed upon to the other four countries involved in the project -- the United States, Russia, China and South Korea.

South Korea and the United States back Japan's bid, while China and Russia favor the EU plan.

The ITER project is expected to take 30 years, including 10 years for construction.

The ITER plant is an experimental facility for thermonuclear fusion, at which nuclear fusion reactions that occur on the sun are to be produced by fusing the nuclei of heavy hydrogen and tritium at temperatures of more than 100 million C. The energy produced from 1 gram of fuel in the facility is equivalent to that of 8 tons of oil.

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