

Ministry eyes 3 ITER-related facilities for Aomori Prefecture

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The science and technology ministry specified three facilities it wants to operate as a reward for abandoning its bid to host the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER), ministry sources said.

The three ITER-related facilities would be located in Rokkasho, Aomori Prefecture, and would help put Japan on an equal footing with the European Union in terms of research into the ITER project, the officials said.

The European Union was named the host of the ITER project after Japan gave up its bid in exchange for preferential treatment concerning construction contracts and jobs for Japanese researchers. The reactor will be built in France.

The project involves six parties--Japan, the United States, the European Union, Russia, China and South Korea. It is designed to create energy by causing a nuclear fusion reaction by heating deuterium and tritium to temperatures exceeding 100 million degrees.

One of the facilities the ministry is eyeing is a remote-control experimental facility that would allow direct access to the actual ITER, according to ministry officials.

Another facility would house a supercomputer to conduct calculations for predictions of experimental results. This would increase efficiency in the research, the officials said.

The third facility the ministry is seeking would serve as a center for the planning process for next-generation reactors.

The ministry also wants to drastically remodel the fusion plasma research device called JT-60 at the Japan Atomic Energy Research Institute in Naka,

Ibaraki Prefecture. The changes would allow the JT-60 to be used as a mini experimental reactor to support and supplement ITER experiments. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology will field the opinions of experts and officially endorse the plan by the end of this month, according to ministry sources.

Tokyo and the EU have already agreed to share the 92 billion yen in expenses to build the three facilities.

The ministry, however, gave up its plan to construct a facility to develop material for reactors through neutron irradiation because of the estimated 90 billion yen construction cost.

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