

Technology and sumo on the menu for French president in Japan



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OSAKA, Japan (AFP) - French President Jacques Chirac has arrived in Japan for an official three-day visit focussing on technology.

[AFP Photo](#)

The president's plane landed at Kansai airport in Japan's second largest city Osaka, where Chirac and his wife Bernadette will spend their first day.

"I am starting to get impatient to return to Japan," Chirac said this week in an interview with the Asahi Shimbun newspaper. "Close to five years without going to Japan for me is intolerable."

Chirac has visited Japan between 45 and 50 occasions as both an elected official and as a private citizen, his office said. A trip scheduled for March 2003 ended up being cancelled because of the outbreak of the US war on Iraq ([news](#) - [web sites](#)).

Upon his arrival in western Japan, Chirac visited a factory of Digital Electronics, which belongs to French group Schneider Electric, before having lunch with businessmen and representatives of the Keidanren, the powerful federation of Japanese employers.

Representatives from several leading French companies, including Areva, Arianespace, Saint-Gobain, Schneider Electric, Total, Thales, and Veolia Environnement were accompanying the president.

Kansai, the industrial heartland of Japan, was hit hard by the economic crisis in the 1990s which forced it to concentrate more on the hi-tech market.

On Saturday afternoon, the French president will attend a Sumo tournament in Osaka.

Chirac, a long-time admirer of the Japanese wrestling sport, will dine with the Sumo fighters, known as 'sumotoris', after the competition.

"I know them well, personally, and therefore I am very happy to go to the tournament," he told the Japanese newspaper Asahi Shimbun this week.

On Sunday, he is due to visit the just-opened World Exposition in Aichi, about 250 kilometers west of Tokyo, before holding discussions in the evening with Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi.

On the final day of his visit, Chirac will make a speech on sustainable development during a symposium of the Nikkei media group and will then be received by the Emperor Akihito and his wife Michiko for lunch.

Chirac is also expected to address more sensitive political issues during his visit like the possible lifting of the European embargo on the deliveries of weapons in China.

On the eve of Chirac's visit Friday, the Japanese government again said that the lifting of the EU arms embargo on China being pushed by France would be a "big problem" for Asian stability.

The two countries are also at loggerheads over the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER), a multibillion-dollar test project for clean, inexhaustible energy.

Japan has said it would maintain its bid to host the revolutionary nuclear project, despite fresh pressure from the European Union ([news](#) - [web sites](#)) which threatened to build the reactor in France unless Japan compromised by July.

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