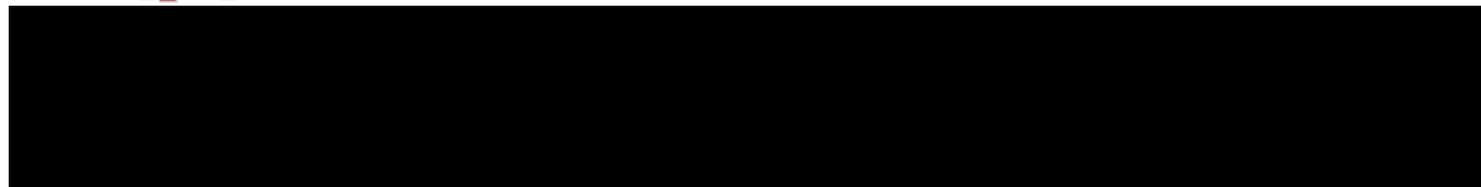


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Japan remains committed to ITER bid, says official

(Kyodo) _ Japan remains committed to its bid to host the world's first nuclear fusion reactor at a site in Aomori Prefecture, a top bureaucrat at Japan's science and technology ministry said Monday.

"No direction has been set" on whether Japan or France will host the site, said Akio Yuki, vice minister of education, culture, sports, science and technology, indicating that Japan aims to pursue its bid to host the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor in the northeastern Japanese village of Rokkasho in Aomori.

Despite the science and technology ministry's firm stance on the ITER project, the Japanese government is also said to be considering giving up the bid as the Finance Ministry has expressed concern over the huge costs involved.

Asked whether the Japanese government is entirely behind the ITER bid, Yuki said, "I believe the government is united and is seeking to host it in Rokkasho."

The European Union wants ITER to be sited in Cadarache, southern France.

The ITER project -- which involves China, the European Union, Japan, Russia, South Korea and the United States -- is expected to take 30 years, including 10 years for construction. The cost is estimated at about \$13 billion, or 1.3 trillion yen.

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With the United States and South Korea supporting Japan while China and Russia are siding with the European Union, the site selection process remains something of a tug-of-war. Japan and the European Union agreed in April to resolve the issue by the Group of Eight summit in Gleneagles, Scotland, in July.

Yuki said Japan and the European Union have reached an agreement over conditions for hosting construction at bilateral talks last Thursday, but declined to reveal details of the agreement.

According to sources familiar with the negotiations, the two sides agreed that the host will shoulder half of the ITER construction costs

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amounting to 570 billion yen and that the other party will host a facility to research materials for ITER use.

Another condition is that the non-host party can send 40 researchers, or 20 percent of the total of 200 researchers, to the ITER site by shouldering 10 percent of the project's operation costs, the sources said.

The conditions agreed upon are almost the same as those proposed respectively by Japan and the European Union, according to the sources.

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