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Japan Denies Report It Dropped Proposal to Host Fusion Reactor

June 22 (Bloomberg) -- Japan's science ministry denied a media report the country dropped its bid to host the world's first nuclear fusion reactor, a decision that would end a standoff with France to site the 4.6 billion-euro (\$5.6 billion) project.

The Mainichi newspaper today reported Japan has given up its bid to site the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor in return for assurances it will manage the project in France and handle contracts for Japanese companies to build the facility. The report cited unidentified Japanese government officials.

``Nothing's been decided on who hosts the reactor," Takahiro Hayashi, deputy director of the science ministry's office of fusion energy, said in a telephone interview today. ``Our stance is still the same."

Japan is waiting for the outcome of a June 28 meeting in Russia of the countries involved in the project, he said.

An agreement would break a deadlock on the site of the reactor project involving the European Union, the U.S., Russia, China, South Korea and Japan. The EU last November said it would start the project in France this year, with or without Japan's support. The EU wants to reach an agreement with Japan by offering it a ``privileged partnership" in the project.

The Mainichi newspaper said Japan has told the EU that it will agree to the reactor being located in Cadarache, southern France. Japan will build the main research facilities and supply a fifth of the personnel, including the project manager, the newspaper said. It will receive a fifth of the building contracts and pay a tenth of construction costs, Mainichi said.

Japan, the U.S. and South Korea want the reactor, which would generate ``clean" energy by fusing together light atoms such as hydrogen, to be sited in Rokkasho village, in the northern Japanese prefecture of Aomori. Russia and China back the French proposal along with the EU.

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