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JAPAN PUSHES FOR NUCLEAR PROJECT, QUESTIONS EU OPTIMISM FRANCE WILL WIN

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TOKYO, Nov 9 (AFP) - Japan is still pushing to host a revolutionary nuclear energy reactor, a Japanese official said Tuesday, questioning the European Union's optimism that France would be the site of the multibillion dollar project.

"We do not understand why the EU suddenly said what they said. Maybe that's only their optimistic speculation. Maybe that's a negotiation technique," an official at Japan's science and technology ministry told AFP.

EU spokesman Fabio Fabbi said Monday the European Union was confident the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) -- a test bed for what is being billed as a safe and inexhaustible energy source -- would be built at Cadarache in southern France.

A meeting is planned Tuesday in Vienna of ITER partners including the United States and South Korea, which support Japan's bid, and Russia and China which back the EU's case.

The Japanese official said there was no change to Tokyo's position of inviting the project to Rokkasho-mura in northern Japan.

"We will push for it at the upcoming meeting in Vienna," said the official, who works in the fusion science development department.

He denied Japan was ready to accept compensation in return for backing out of hosting the site.

Satoru Ohtake, director of nuclear fusion at the ministry of science and technology, was adamant Monday at talks with the European Union in Vienna that Japan was not changing its position.

ITER, which aims to emulate the sun's nuclear fusion, is not expected to generate electricity before 2050.

The ITER budget is projected to be 10 billion euros (13 billion dollars) over the next 30 years, including 4.7 billion euros to build the reactor. The EU plans to finance 40 percent of the total.

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