

France's Hollande on Japan visit to push nuke ties

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TOKYO (AP) — French President Francois Hollande arrives in Japan on Thursday for a visit expected to focus on closer cooperation in nuclear energy technologies and on Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's economic strategies.

Hollande and Abe will hold summit talks that local media say may yield an agreement on cooperating in nuclear fuel cycle technology, next-generation reactors and decommissioning of nuclear power plants.

Japan is struggling with the cleanup from meltdowns at the Fukushima Dai-ichi plant following the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami disasters, and with the suspension of its Monju fast-breeder reactor, which is meant to process spent atomic fuel.

Abe is eager to sell Japan's nuclear technology overseas, despite the suspension of most nuclear power generation following the Fukushima disaster, and is endeavoring to show it can offer the highest safety standards. Its Mitsubishi Heavy Industries has teamed up with France's nuclear services giant Areva in building a nuclear reactor on the Black Sea coast in Turkey.

Earlier this week, Hitachi-GE Nuclear Energy, Ltd. and Areva announced they plan to work together on improving nuclear safety through filtered containment venting systems that can remove radioactive materials from the air.

Areva also has aided the crippled Fukushima plant with water treatment technology, though Tokyo Electric Power Co., its operator, soon switched to using a system designed by Toshiba after deciding the French system was not as effective as expected.

Though France is the only nation with technology for a closed nuclear fuel cycle, which reprocesses and reuses spent nuclear fuel, Hollande has announced plans to scale back its atomic power program, cutting the country's reliance on atomic power, from 75 percent to 50 percent by 2025.

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* <http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130606p2g00m0dm092000c.html>