

## France's Hollande visits Japan to push nuke ties

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TOKYO (AP) — French

President Francois Hollande arrived 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,

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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.

On broader issues, Hollande will get a first-hand look at how Abe is fighting Japan's two-decade-old economic slump through his "Abenomics" policy mix of monetary and fiscal stimulus and reforms. Many commentators have urged European leaders to reconsider fiscal austerity imposed due to the financial crisis, pointing to Japan's emergence from recession late last year and its 3.5 percent annual economic growth rate in the last quarter as evidence that stimulus is crucial for recovery.

France has been seeking to counter its economic woes by growing its business with Asia. Hollande returned just over a month ago from a visit to China, where the two countries clinched deals on the sale of dozens of Airbus aircraft and on building a used nuclear fuel treatment and recycling facility.

It is also hoping to work with Japan on emerging technologies such as nanotechnology, information technology and robotics. The two sides also have pledged to increase student and cultural exchanges.

France's annual exports to Japan total around 7.5 billion euros (\$9.8 billion), while its imports are just over 9 billion euros. Both rank 11th as respective trade partners.

Hollande's is the first state visit to Japan this year and as such he was to be given a formal welcoming ceremony and a banquet hosted by Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko. He and French first lady Valerie Trierweiler are due to leave Japan on Saturday.

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