

Sony, NEC, Nissan May Merge Battery Business

The Associated Press

TOKYO, Jan. 25 (Kyodo) — A state-backed corporate turnaround fund is encouraging Sony Corp., NEC Corp. and Nissan Motor Co. to merge their lithium-ion battery businesses in the face of intensifying international competition, sources close to the matter said Friday.

The Innovation Network Corp. of Japan and the three companies are aiming to reach an agreement on the merger plan within fiscal 2013, with the fund offering to invest in the merged entity, they said.

Automotive Energy Supply Corp., the Nissan-NEC venture that produces lithium-ion batteries for vehicles, is being encouraged to take a majority stake in Sony's battery unit, according to the sources.

Sony Energy Devices Corp. makes lithium-ion batteries for mobile phones and personal computers. Sony has been looking to sell the battery unit as it faces an uphill battle with its South Korean rivals.

The plan is aimed at preventing overseas makers from capturing key technologies of the Japanese manufacturers amid wide interest from overseas in Sony's battery unit, but the sources said it remains uncertain whether the merger will be realized due to differences between the parties concerned.

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