



Japanese set to direct 'sun-power' nuclear reactor in France

September 16, 2005



Japan has been asked to nominate the chief of an international project to build a multi-billion-dollar nuclear fusion reactor in southern France, the project's six partners said in a statement.

Negotiators from the European Union, the United States, Russia, Japan, South Korea and China said after a meeting on Monday at Cadarache, the proposed site for the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER),

that they also wanted construction to start as soon as possible, the communique said.

"In particular, the delegations expressed the wish to see Japan identify suitably qualified candidate(s) to be designated as nominee director-general," the statement said.

A Japanese physicist, Yasuo Shimomura, is the interim leader of the ITER project team.

After years of wrangling, Cadarache was chosen over Japan's Rokkasho-mura on June 28 as the site for the reactor, designed to emulate the power of the sun, after Tokyo withdrew its bid to host the 10-billion-euro (12-billion-dollar), 30-year project.

As a trade-off, the EU promised Japan 20 percent of staff posts and construction contracts, and the director-general's office.

Nuclear fusion produces no greenhouse gas emissions and much lower quantities of radioactive waste than conventional fission reactors.

Monday's meeting, the 10th involving official negotiators, also discussed the structure of the ITER organisation, staffing, resources and risk management, the statement said.

"Negotiators agreed that substantial progress was made on all topics and looked forward to an early completion of the negotiations," the statement said.

Delegates also had an informal meeting with an Indian group which expressed India's interest in joining ITER and agreed to send a fact-finding mission to the southeast Asian country.

"In a separate meeting, the ITER delegates had an informal exchange with a delegation from India on India's interest in the possibility of participating in ITER," the statement said.

"It was subsequently agreed that, without any further commitment, an exploratory fact-finding mission would visit India to follow up this exchange for future consideration by the ITER delegations," it added.

Three meetings between ITER negotiators have been pencilled in between September and December 2005 to finalize the choice of director-general and to draft the agreement establishing the ITER organisation.

Environmental groups were dismayed when Cadarache was chosen as the site for the experimental reactor, with Greenpeace International blasting the project as "a dangerous toy which will never deliver any useful energy."

The ITER centre is to be built beside the existing Cadarache nuclear research park, 70 kilometres (40 miles) inland from the Mediterranean port of Marseilles.

Established in 1959 by president Charles de Gaulle, the centre has helped develop three generations of nuclear reactors and includes six low-capacity experimental reactors and a 17-year-old nuclear fusion laboratory.

France has invested heavily in nuclear power generation, with 58 reactors supplying 80 percent of the country's energy needs.

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