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Japan vows no backing down to EU pressure on pioneering nuclear project

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Japan will not budge in talks to choose the site of a revolutionary nuclear reactor, a top negotiator said, accusing the European Union of causing the deadlock by its stubborn support for France over Japan.

Talks among the six parties building the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) have failed to decide who will host the project billed as a test bed for a safe, inexhaustible energy source of the future.

While the United States and South Korea support Japan's offer to build ITER in Rokkasho-mura, a northern village near the Pacific Ocean, the EU, China and Russia back France's bid for the project in Cadarache, southern France.

The EU, which hopes to reach a definitive accord by mid-2005, has threatened to press ahead with the construction of ITER in Cadarache if Japan did not agree to a deal soon.

"If the EU believes Japan will give in by their haughty negotiation tactics, they are making a big mistake," Toichi Sakata, a top Japanese negotiator for ITER, told AFP.

"If the EU wants to press ahead without Japan, go ahead. It won't rattle us. It won't rattle Japan, the United States or South Korea either," said Sakata, director-general of the research and development bureau at the science and technology ministry.

"The reason we have yet to find a breakthrough is the EU's persistent support for Cadarache. We believe whoever produces a better proposal should win ITER and Japan's proposal is better than the EU's counter-proposal," he said.

The site for ITER, one of the most exciting ventures in international science, must be decided by consensus, partly because all parties will be required to fund the multibillion-dollar project.

Sakata said the EU negotiators were "stuck-up and overbearing."

"After seeing the EU's negotiation style, our strong supporter, the United States, is having doubts over whether the EU is really capable of carrying out ITER," he said.

Sakata said Japan was continuing talks with the EU but felt no rush to seal an unfavorable deal.

"For Japan, there is no deadline and we are not going to compromise. Why do we need to reach an agreement quickly? ITER won't be ready for the next 50 years. It is not like ITER would collapse if we fail to strike a deal within the next few months," he said.

ITER, which would emulate the sun's nuclear fusion, is not expected to generate inexhaustible supplies of electricity before 2050.

The budget for ITER is projected to be 10 billion euros (13 billion dollars) over the next 30 years, including 4.7 billion euros to build the reactor alone.

If ITER goes to Rokkasho-mura in Aomori prefecture, some 600 kilometers (370 miles) north of Tokyo, it would bring at least 1.2 trillion yen (1.2 billion dollars) to the Aomori, a prefectural official said.

The EU argues that the project would get off the ground faster in Cadarache as the town is the hub of France's nuclear research and has 400 fusion experts among 3,500 scientists.

But Sakata insisted Rokkasho-mura was better qualified than Cadarache in terms of safety, financial commitment from the government and Japan's high-level scientific research.

"To build ITER, you have to ship hundreds of super-heavy items. Some containers can weigh as much as 1,000 tons. But Rokkasho-mura is just five kilometers away from a port whereas Cadarache is located 100 kilometers from a port, posing serious risks for transportation," he said.

"Also Japan's financial commitment for ITER is very clear. But honestly speaking, I must say the EU's financial commitment is not clear. Without a clear financial commitment, how can we be sure if we can complete the construction of ITER?"

The EU has called on other nations to join the ITER project, but Sakata said such a move could only complicate already bogged-down negotiations.

"Bringing new members is unrealistic because the six parties have yet to solve the most difficult problem," he said.

 **[ITER - International Fusion Energy Organisation \[/links/Link.2004-01-13.0427 \]](#)**

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