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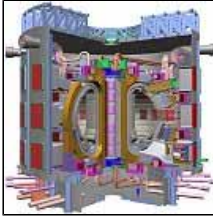
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South Korea could support French site for nuclear fusion project: minister



South Korea could reconsider its position and support the choice of a French site for the international multi-billion dollar experimental nuclear fusion project ITER, a French minister said.

"I believe we were understood. The South Koreans will re-examine their position and we will work with them," said Claudie Haignere, minister for research and new technologies, on her return from Seoul Tuesday.

Haignere held two days of talks Sunday and Monday in the South Korean capital with Oh Myung, special advisor to the president, as well as research officials.

The six partners in the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) project, which aims to produce the clean, safe, inexhaustible energy of the future, failed to choose the site at a meeting in Washington on December

A decision is expected to be taken in mid-February on whether the ITER site should be the southeastern French town of Cadarache, chosen as the EU's bid, or the northern Japanese village of Rokkasho-mura.

The EU has won support from China and Russia to site ITER at Cadarache. Japan has the backing of South Korea and now the United States.

The project, emulating the sun's nuclear fusion, is not expected to generate electricity before 2050.

US Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham has said that Japan offers "the superior site" for the project and is the better option "based on the technical criteria".

"Japan has great competence in the field of fusion," Haignere admitted. "But it's all about an international partnership in everyone's interests.

"Those who act otherwise are not playing fairly. We prefer to convince and say that it's at Cadarache that they will have all guarantees of scientific, technical and industrial success."

ITER - International Fusion Energy Organisation

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