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France and Japan disagree over outcome of ITER meeting

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Discussions over the eventual site of the international thermonuclear experimental reactor (ITER) have become more heated after the French Minister for Research declared that an agreement had been reached. Japan immediately rejected the claim and made it known that a diplomatic protest over the declaration was being considered.



Rokkasho, Japan

A statement from the French minister François D'Aubert, released on 5 May, described the arrangement as a 'technical agreement', which he said had been made at a meeting in Geneva between the head of the Commission's Research DG, Achilleas Mitsos, and his Japanese counterpart Tesuhisa Shirakawa. The compromise was said to clarify the 'modalities of cooperation' between the host country and the non-host country.

The French statement asserts that the agreement will be ratified at a ministerial conference before the end of June. 'This well-balanced agreement could lead Japan to decide not to be the host country for the reactor. If this is indeed the case, France will welcome the ITER reactor in Cadarache, at the mouth of the Rhone. A conclusion is close!'

Japan has a different understanding of the Geneva meeting's outcome however. 'No decision has been reached on the construction site,' Toichi Sakata, Director-General of the Research and Development Bureau of the Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Ministry, told reporters on 6 May.

Mr Sakata added: 'We have never brought up proposals that suggested our intent to concede,' The Japan Times reports Mr Sakata as saying. He added that Japan remains committed to its bid to host the reactor in Rokkasho.

The construction phase of the ITER project has been stalled for some time due to a division between the participating countries on where the reactor should be located. While the EU, Russia and China would like to see the reactor built in Cadarache, France, Japan, the US and South Korea favour Rokkasho in Japan.

For further information on ITER, please visit:
<http://www.iter.org>

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