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EU threat over nuke reactor 'shameful'

VIENNA: The European Union's suggestion that it might go its own way and build the world's first nuclear fusion reactor in France is shameful and destructive, a Japanese official said on Wednesday.

Six-party talks on where to build the \$12 billion International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER), that would try to replicate the way the sun generates energy, ended on Tuesday with no decision on rival sites in France and Japan.

Before the talks with South Korea, Russia, the United States, China and Japan ended, an EU spokesman suggested Europe might go ahead and build the fusion plant in France with any willing partners if its offer did not prevail.

"That is a very shameful, destructive way (of negotiating) because it's something like opening a war," Satoru Ohtake, head of nuclear fusion at Japan's Science and Technology Ministry, told Reuters. "We agreed to the six-party process. If the EU does this, it's a break of the six-party framework."

Nuclear fusion has been touted as a long-term solution to the world's energy problems as it would be low in pollution and use limitless sea water as fuel. However, 50 years of research have failed to produce a commercially viable fusion reactor.

After the meeting, European Commission spokesman Fabio Fabbi toned down his comments when asked if the EU would act alone. "We're not there yet. We are still in a multilateral process," he said. "We are rather satisfied with the results of this meeting."

EU officials said they were confident the ITER would go to Cadarache, near Marseilles in France, and not to rival Rokkasho-mura in northern Japan.

Ohtake said the six parties were split over where to put the ITER, with the United States and South Korea favouring the Japanese plan and Russia and China backing the EU proposal.

After the two-day talks ended on Tuesday, the six parties issued a joint statement expressing the hope that the issue would quickly be resolved. reuters

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