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Japan's science minister seeking support for nuclear fusion site

14 January 2004

Japan's science and technology minister Takeo Kawamura left Wednesday on a whirlwind tour of South Korea, Russia and China to drum up support for Japan's proposed site for a multi-billion dollar experimental nuclear fusion project, officials said.

Kawamura was leading a delegation of around 10 people, including the governor of Aomori prefecture in northern Japan, where Tokyo wants the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) project to be located in the village of Rokkasho-mura, a science and technology ministry official said.

The minister was to meet his South Korean counterpart Oh Myung on Wednesday, before flying on to Moscow, the statement said.

On Thursday Kawamura will meet Russia's nuclear energy minister Alexander Rumiantsev and Yevgeny Velikhov, the head of the Kurchatov Institute nuclear research centre.

In Beijing on Friday, the minister will hold talks with China's science and technology minister Xu Guanhua.

"The purpose of (Kawamura's) trip is to explain Rokkasho-mura's advantages and seek support" for Japan's bid to host the project, the ministry said in a statement.

The attempt to emulate the sun's nuclear fusion in what is being billed as the clean, safe, inexhaustible energy source of the future, will either be sited in the French town of Cadarache or Rokkasho-mura.

The choice was supposed to have been made in December by delegates from the European Union, the US, China, Japan, South Korea and Russia at a meeting in Reston, Virginia, west of Washington.

But after they failed to reach a consensus, the decision was delayed, probably until mid-February.

The choice of the site must be made by consensus, and not by a simple majority, partly because all parties will be required to fund the project.

South Korea already supports the Japanese bid, but Russia and China are backing the European Union's French site.

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