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## **Chirac calls ITER essential for planet's future**

CADARACHE, France, June 30 (AFP) - French President Jacques Chirac on Thursday hailed a decision to build a multi-billion-dollar nuclear fusion reactor in southern France as vital to the planet's future, praising European solidarity in sealing the deal.

"This project is essential for our future and the future of the planet," Chirac told some 1,500 invited guests after a two-hour visit of the Cadarache site, chosen Tuesday to host the ambitious experimental nuclear fusion reactor.

"Today, our energy consumption has put us in danger. It's mainly based on oil, gas and coal," he said, resources that are increasingly in demand "due to the emergence of new major economic powers like China and India".

The French president said the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) -- designed to emulate the power of the sun -- would help the world "move toward development of energy sources of the future".

"The long-term goal is to obtain for humanity a source of abundant energy, energy that will not harm the environment".

Nuclear fusion produces no greenhouse gas emissions and low levels of radioactive waste.

The six ITER partners -- the European Union, the United States, Russia, Japan, South Korea and China -- agreed on Cadarache after Japan withdrew its bid to host the EUR 10 billion, 30-year project.

In return, the EU has promised Japan 20 percent of staff posts and 20 percent of construction contracts for the project, as well as support for a suitable Japanese candidate for the post of ITER director general.

Chirac praised his EU partners for working together during negotiations to secure the ITER project, noting that the positive result "proves that when Europe is solid and sticks together, it can do exceptional things".

He jokingly wondered aloud why Britain had not attempted to see the ITER reactor built on its soil, saying: "I never asked the question, so as not to give them any bad ideas".

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