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## Japan not deserting six-party cooperation over nuclear fusion plan: official

TOKYO (AFP) Feb 20, 2004

Japan on Friday denied reports it planned to split from an international consortium building a multi-billion dollar nuclear fusion reactor, saying it remained fully committed to the stalled six-party project.

The Nihon Keizai Shimbun said Friday that Japan might start a new nuclear fusion plan if it fails to break the deadlock with France over the siting of the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER).

Japan plans to notify the other parties of its intention at their meeting in Vienna on Saturday, the economic daily said, citing a ruling coalition source.

The ITER project has hit a snag over its location -- whether the French town of Cadarache or the northern Japanese village of Rokkasho-mura should host the 10-billion-dollar project.

Vice-ministerial officials from the European Union (EU), the United States, China, Japan, South Korea and Russia are to discuss compromise plans to help the project move forward.

A Japanese official in charge of the ITER project denied the report.

"As we believe cooperation among the six parties is important, we are working to see an accord over the siting," he said.

"We are making efforts to maintain the current scheme and have no intention of telling (the other partners) that we are breaking it up," he said while declining to comment on what Japan would do if the talks broke down.

The Nihon Keizai quoted the anonymous ruling coalition source as saying the Japanese proposal would call for scrapping the plan and instead inviting participation in a Rokkasho-mura-based project.

The participation of the United States and South Korea would mainly be sought for the new project, it said.

ITER aims to test technology for nuclear fusion, billed as the clean, safe, inexhaustible energy source of the future, but it is not slated to become operational until 2014, and is expected to run for 20 years.

The six parties failed to decide on the site at a meeting in December, with Japan drawing backing from the United States and South Korea,



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while France won support from China and Russia.



The new plan would cost Japan far more than 600 billion yen the nation has pledged to put up if it hosts the project, the daily said.

But the government source was quoted as saying: "We would not have to change annual spending (for the project) if we extend the construction and operation period by some 30 years."

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