

Japan regrets French minister's comments on nuclear project



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TOKYO (AFP) - A Japanese official said he regretted a French minister's suggestion that France is going to host a revolutionary nuclear energy project while the site is still in dispute.



[AFP Photo](#)

The European Union ([news - web sites](#)) and Japan are vying to host the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER), a test-bed for what is being billed as a clean, safe, inexhaustible energy source of the future.

The United States and South Korea ([news - web sites](#)) support the Japanese candidate site to host ITER, but the European Union, Russia and China back the French site in the southern town of Cadarache.

"We have conducted six-party talks up to now. In the midst of those talks, it is very unfortunate that France is saying the project will go ahead without a decision having been reached," Takahiro Hayashi, deputy director of Japan's Office of Fusion Energy, told AFP.

Hayashi was responding to French research minister Francois d'Aubert's comments Thursday that Europe could go ahead with the ITER project in Cadarache even if the United States, Japan and South Korea disagreed.

The Nihon Keizai economic daily quoted the minister as saying construction would begin in Cadarache even if the site lacked US, South Korean and Japanese support.

"Given the situation today, it's Cadarache," D'Aubert told reporters on a tour of the site Thursday.

"Frankly... we are on the right path," he said. "I'm not saying we are on the home stretch, but it's not far at all."

The European Union reaffirmed its desire last month to get broad international backing for the project, but sources said the EU was growing anxious about delays on picking a site and might in the last resort go ahead at its own location.

Wrangling over the decision is expected to focus on a meeting of the six partners in Vienna in mid-October, hosted by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

A next meeting of the ITER six-party group has not been set although negotiations are under way to hold it at the end of the month, Hayashi said.

D'Aubert has argued the 10 billion dollar project could be launched with EU, French, Russian and Chinese funding.

India, Brazil and Switzerland are also interested in participating and could be asked to shoulder some of the remaining costs, he has said.

D'Aubert is expected to visit Tokyo by the end of the year for regular scientific exchanges between France and Japan.

The project, emulating the sun's nuclear fusion, is not expected to generate electricity before 2050.

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