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Yahoo! India News Mon, Apr 18, 2005

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Monday April 18, 10:52 PM

EU stresses nuclear fusion reactor to be in Europe **REUTERS**

By Huw Jones

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LUXEMBOURG (Reuters) - The world's first nuclear fusion reactor will be in Europe, European Union member state ministers said on Monday, despite no agreement yet with project partner Japan, which also wants to host the plant.

The six partners involved in the project are divided in support for competing bids from Japan and France to host the site of the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor project or ITER.

The parties are the EU, Japan, China, the United States, Russia and South Korea.

A meeting of EU ministers agreed on Monday they would do all they could to meet the July deadline for reaching agreement on the fusion project. EU leaders in March agreed that building work on a European site must begin by the end of the year.

A visit by European Commissioner for Research, Janez Potocnik, to Japan this month failed to reach a resolution, though he was still optimistic a deal will be concluded.

"We are both satisfied that ideas in the EU and Japan are converging... It's not a question of site or non-site," Potocnik said.

"We are building a privileged partnership... I am optimistic concerning the final talks and possibility of reaching agreement with the six partners."

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Ministers asked the Commission "to intensify contacts with the partners in order to end up with the maximum of partners within the timeframe, with a solution involving six still the preference of the Council."

Potocnik told a joint press briefing with the ministers that negotiations with Japan would continue, based on giving "privileged partnership" to the Asian giant.

"We both believe we need to have a special agreement between ourselves in the context of a broader partnership and approach," Potocnik said.

Such a partnership would recognise the reality of the situation and could speed up the commercial use of nuclear fusion as Japan supplied the necessary materials for its production, Potocnik said, but declined to give further details.

Diplomats said China and Russia were thought keen to have six partners in the project to avoid higher costs on each partner, and added that Brazil, India and other countries were also interested in joining.

The EU said the total cost of the project is about 10 billion euros (\$12.97 billion), of which 4.5 billion euros will go directly on building the reactor.

The hope is the reactor will help make nuclear fusion an economic source of energy by about 2050. It could be operational by 2016 if building work begins before the end of this year, the EU said.

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