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JAPAN TO ANNOUNCE JUNE 28 GIVING UP NUCLEAR REACTOR BID: REPORT

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TOKYO, June 17 (AFP) - Japan will announce on June 28 that it is giving up on hosting a revolutionary nuclear energy project also sought by France after a long deadlock in negotiations, a newspaper reported Friday.

Japan will drop its bid at a meeting in Russia of the six partners in the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) -- China, the European Union, Japan, Russia, South Korea and the United States, the Nihon Keizai Shimbun said in its evening edition.

An official at the science ministry denied the report, saying Japan was doing its utmost to bring the multibillion-dollar project to the northern village of Rokkasho-mura.

"We are doing our best in preparation for the international conference to be held in late June," the official told AFP.

Japan dispatched an envoy to the European Union earlier this week to conduct negotiations on ITER which again ended in a standoff.

The Nihon Keizai said Japan concluded after the Brussels meeting that the European Union was determined to bring ITER to the southeastern French town of Cadarache.

Previous Japanese news reports had indicated that Tokyo was publicly sticking to the bid in the hope of securing large chunks of the project other than the reactor itself.

Nariaki Nakayama, minister of education, culture, sports, science and technology, which is in charge of the ITER project, Friday morning briefed Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi about the negotiations.

Koizumi said the talks were being "well done" but did not give specific instructions on the meeting in Russia, according to the ministry official.

President Jacques Chirac has previously said France is virtually certain to host ITER.

The United States and South Korea support Japan's bid for ITER, while China and Russia back the European Union's efforts to bring it to France.

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