

France, Japan vie for fusion site

From AFP 21feb04

THE European Union, Russia, China, the United States, South Korea and Japan held informal closed-door discussions here Friday on plans to build a multi-billion dollar nuclear fusion reactor, officials said. But no final decision was expected on breaking the deadlock over where to base the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER), the officials added. The talks were to continue Saturday in plenary session.

Two sites, the French town of Cadarache and the northern Japanese village of Rokkasho-mura, are vying to host the \$US10 billion project.

The United States and South Korea are backing Japan while France has the support of the European Union, China and Russia.

Earlier Friday, the Japanese Nihon Keizai Shimbun said that Japan might start a new nuclear fusion plan if it failed to break the deadlock with France over the location of the project.

The economic daily quoted a ruling coalition source as saying Tokyo planned to notify the other parties of its intention at their meeting in Vienna on Saturday.

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 location," 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.