

## Japan may take nuclear option in fusion row

By David Pilling in Tokyo

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If Europeans start work on a \$10bn nuclear fusion experiment before reaching an agreement with their Japanese partner, Tokyo would consider walking away from the joint project, Japan's chief negotiator has warned.

The European Union says it has the financial and scientific clout to build and run a reactor in France, without Japan's support.

Tokyo says it will fund more than half the cost if the project comes to Japan at Rokkasho-Mura.

In an interview with the Financial Times, Satoru Ohtake, director for fusion energy at Japan's education, science and technology ministry, said: "If Europe maintains its hard line and if France starts building without any agreement from us, we will never join. That would be a miserable result. That would split the world in two."

Japan has been angered by what it regards as the EU's high-handed attitude in insisting the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (Iter) experiment be hosted in France. In a meeting in Vienna this month the EU offered what Japan considered an insulting "sweetener" to give up hosting the project.

"They are treating this like a king and servant relationship, where the king throws small things to the beggars," said Mr Ohtake, who has been negotiating with the EU for more than three years. "It is bad manners. We have our pride."

China and Russia are backing the EU on its proposed construction site in France, while the US and South Korea are supporting Japan's bid.

An EU official with close knowledge of the talks admitted Europe had mishandled the negotiations. By being so public about its determination to build the reactor in France, he said, EU negotiators had humiliated the Japanese and hardened their position.

Iter would be the world's first large-scale demonstration of nuclear fusion, the reaction that powers the sun. It is due to start operating in 2014 and to run for about 20 years. Some energy experts say fusion is the best option for clean and plentiful power in the second half of the 21st century.

The experiment will provide work to hundreds of scientists in the host region as well as up to 2,000 construction jobs. Mr Ohtake said the ideal solution would be to reduce the differences between host and non-host nation to a minimum so the loser could climb down gracefully. If that were achieved, he said, the final decision could be made by a method suggested by Sir David King, scientific adviser to the British government — tossing a coin.