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France, India talk fusion

PRANAY SHARMA

New Delhi, Oct. 27: France has sought India's participation in the multi-billion-dollar International Thermonuclear Reactor project which aims to use fusion energy for peaceful purposes.

Almost all key world players, including the US, Europe, Japan, South Korea, China and Russia, are already part of the mega project better known by the acronym Iter and likely to cost nearly \$ 25 billion.

The visiting French foreign minister Michel Barnier raised the issue during talks with his Indian counterpart and host K. Natwar Singh today. Barnier is on his first official visit to India. He also called on Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and defence minister Pranab Mukherjee.

The proposed Iter project — the first of its kind — will be the first fusion device to produce thermal energy at the level of an electricity-producing power station.

The project might take care of India's rising electricity needs and provide it additional technology for the peaceful use of nuclear energy, but more significant is that Delhi has been invited to participate. It not only brackets India with key international players, including all five nuclear powers, but also acknowledges Delhi's economic and technological clout.

The issue is likely to figure during the November 8 India-European Union summit in The Hague. The Prime Minister and some of his senior cabinet colleagues and officials are likely to attend the summit.



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