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Three compromise plans eyed for fusion project site

A team of experts on an international nuclear fusion project has drawn up three compromise proposals in a bid to resolve the row over whether Japan or France will host the \$12 billion, 30-year energy project, Japanese government sources said.

The six parties involved in the Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) project have been unable to agree where to locate the world's first prototype nuclear fusion reactor. The proposals come after minister-level talks in December broke down due to a sharp disagreement over the two rival sites.

The experts from the six parties taking part in ITER -- China, the European Union, Japan, South Korea, Russia and the United States -- will submit the proposals for discussion during vice minister-level talks Saturday in Vienna. The plans basically envision facilities separate from but supplementary to ITER.

The three proposals have been formulated on the basis of a communique issued by the six following the failed talks in Washington, which stated that they will "conduct a rapid exploration of the advantages of a broader project approach to fusion power."

The envisaged approach would allow the site not selected as the reactor venue to host other facilities to be created as well as the experimental reactor.

The sources said the first proposal involves creating a remote facility for simulation and data analysis of nuclear fusion, while the second suggestion is for an existing nuclear fusion facility to be used as an auxiliary ITER facility for supplementary experiments.

The third proposal, according to the sources, envisions the creation of a nuclear fusion engineering research institute necessary for the future demonstration of reactor development.

If the third proposal is adopted, additional funding will be required for research, unlike the other proposals, whose costs would be covered under the current funding allocation.

The likelihood of one of the plans resolving the row, however, are uncertain, given that both Japan and France are adamant in seeking the ITER construction on their own sites.

Japan has proposed hosting the project in the village of Rokkasho, Aomori Prefecture, while the EU has selected the southern French town of Cadarache as its candidate venue. Rokkasho is already the site of a uranium enrichment plant, while a nuclear fuel reprocessing plant is scheduled to be completed by 2006.

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