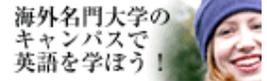


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Japan to offer compromise on ITER fusion project, but only up to a point

Technology minister Takeo Kawamura said Wednesday that Japan is ready to compromise in the battle to host an international nuclear fusion project -- but said it will stick to its position that the reactor itself should be based in Japan.

"We are hoping to reach an agreement in the next meeting by studying and proposing dividing locations between the reactor and the data center," Kawamura said in an address to the Foreign Press Center.

"But the compromise plan we are considering is based on the condition that the core site will be located in Japan."

During a meeting in December, the six parties involved in the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor failed to reach an accord on which of the two rival candidate sites -- Rokkasho in Aomori Prefecture and Cadarache in France -- will host the project.

While the United States and South Korea backed the Japanese site, Russia and China supported the French site promoted by the European Union.

The six are expected to make a final decision in their next meeting next month.

In an effort to host the world's first prototype nuclear fusion reactor, Japan will send technological experts next week to China, South Korea and Russia, an aide to Kawamura said.

Kawamura, minister of education, culture, sports, science and technology, said he is "convinced" the Japanese bid will get the nod, having visited the three countries earlier this month.

During the trip, Kawamura emphasized the importance of having an Asian country host the innovative energy project.

Under the project, the construction of the experimental nuclear fusion reactor is supposed to start this year, with operations scheduled to begin in 2014. After operating for 20 years, the reactor would be dismantled.

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