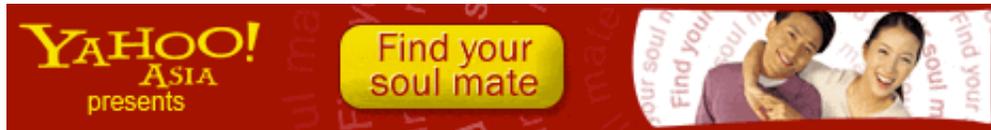



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Wednesday December 8, 17:43 PM

## 2ND LD: Japan better choice for ITER given Asian energy demand: governor

(Kyodo) \_ (EDS: CORRECTING NAME OF FRENCH INSTIUTION IN 5TH GRAF FROM BOTTOM)

The governor of a prefecture aspiring to host a multibillion-dollar international nuclear energy project stepped up lobbying Wednesday for the Japanese site, saying it is a better choice than a European location given a surge in energy demand and rapid economic growth in Asia.

"I believe it is of international significance to host the ITER in Asia, whose population and economy has posted sharp expansion," Aomori Gov. Shingo Mimura said amid an escalating row over whether Japan or France will host the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor.

If Japan becomes home to the world's first thermonuclear reactor, it would be the first time for Asia, which includes emerging economic powerhouses China and India, to host a large-scale international science and technology project.

Mimura also said he believes that China, a member of the ITER that also includes Japan, Russia, South Korea, the European Union and the United States, "understands the significance of hosting ITER in Asia" although Beijing is backing the European Union.

Japan wants to host the ITER in Rokkasho, Aomori Prefecture, while the 25-nation European Union wants it to be based in Cadarache, southeastern France.

The European Union apparently wants to clinch a deal by the end of this year. On Tuesday, Japan's science minister, Nariaki Nakayama, said negotiators are making efforts to hold a six-party ministerial meeting by the year-end, signaling that Japan and the European Union may resolve the standoff by then.

The ITER project is the latest stage in the decades-long quest to develop nuclear fusion power. In conventional nuclear power plants based on nuclear fission technology, heavy atoms are split to release energy. But in a fusion reactor, energy is harnessed by forcing the nuclei of light atoms together, the same process that takes place at the core of the sun and unleashes a huge amount of energy.

The ITER project, which scientists say would lead to energy creation at lower costs with much less pollution, is expected to last 30 years at an overall cost of 1.3 trillion yen, or some \$13 billion or 10 billion euros.

In an interview with Kyodo News in the prefectural capital of Aomori, Mimura said he has "no doubt" that Rokkasho will host the ITER, citing the village's solid industrial infrastructure along with Japan's advanced nuclear fusion technology.

"The Rokkasho site is only 5 kilometers from the sea, making it easy to transport heavy components (for the ITER) from ships. In contrast, the Cadarache site is 100 km away from the nearest port and it would require considerable work, such as expanding existing roads and reinforcing bridges" before putting the ITER into operation, he said.

"Besides, Rokkasho is not far from Tokyo, only a flight of an hour and a bit. It is not as remote as Western media say," the governor said, adding he is encouraged by firm support from Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, a close ally of U.S. President George W. Bush.

Meanwhile, EU officials argued Cadarache is better than Rokkasho because it is near Marseille, a major French city, and is close to the CEA (the French atomic energy authority), a major nuclear research institute in Europe.

"As far as access is concerned, as far as geotechnical issues are concerned, as far as seismic characteristics, or hydro or geological characteristics are concerned, all (of them) have been proven, studied very carefully, have been characterized as being adequate for a site like ITER," Bernhard Zepter, ambassador and head of the Delegation of the European Commission in Japan, told Kyodo News earlier in Tokyo.

Zepter also said France has "a good experience and well-established practice" in transportation and storage of nuclear waste.

"We have common interests. Both Japan and Europe are dependent to a large extent on new and innovative energy resources. And it would be in our interest to share our money and our wisdom, and to find a common solution," he said.

"We made that very clear that we are still confident that it should be possible on the basis of our proposals to find a solution which also satisfies the Japanese ambitions of nuclear fusion technologies concerned."

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