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JAPAN, EU GIVE THEMSELVES UNTIL JULY TO BREAK IMPASSE ON NUCLEAR REACTOR

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TOKYO, April 12 (AFP) - Japan and the European Union on Tuesday gave themselves less than three months to break a deadlock over which side will host a multibillion-dollar project to build a revolutionary nuclear reactor.

The European Union wants to build the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) in France and has threatened to go it alone unless Japan drops its rival bid.

Talks in Tokyo aimed at breaking the impasse led only to an agreement to make a decision before the July 6-8 summit in Scotland of the Group of Eight nations, which will be attended by the Japanese and French leaders.

"We have agreed to reach an agreement on the site issue by July," Japanese Science and Technology Minister Nariaki Nakayama said after talks with visiting EU research commissioner Janez Potocnik.

"We have come to the stage where we have to reach a political settlement," Nakayama told reporters. "We have to do it."

ITER, which would emulate the sun's nuclear fusion, is designed to generate inexhaustible supplies of electricity at some time in the future, but is not expected to be operational before 2050.

The United States and South Korea support Japan's offer to build ITER in Rokkasho-mura, a northern village near the Pacific Ocean, while China and Russia back the bid of the southern French town of Cadarache.

The European Union, which has repeatedly called on Japan to drop its bid, is due to hold a key ministerial meeting on ITER on April 18.

Potocnik said he hoped the agreement by July would have the understanding of all six sides which are part of ITER and take a "broader approach" than the issue of which side hosts the reactor.

He said ITER would be a partnership in which the host

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would contribute to the side which is not chosen.

"It is important to understand that we are searching for a solution inside the so-called broader approach," Potocnik said.

"I think it is crucial at this moment that we stick to our dialogue to try to preserve the six-party option and to find a solution where from the scientific point of view this would be the best," he said.

"We agreed that the ITER project is of utmost importance for the future of mankind and we should realize the ITER project by six parties as soon as possible with the cooperation between the European Union and Japan," he said.

"We have to create the best possible conditions for our bilateral long-term cooperation," he said.

But a Japanese science official who attended Tuesday's talks said Japan would not give in to the pressure.

"It is now up to the politicians. There is a need for political judgment," he said.

The Japanese official held out the possibility of another meeting between top European and Japanese officials on the issue before the G8 summit.

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