

International Intelligence

France Finally Chosen for International Fusion Site

The partners participating in the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor fusion program (ITER) have finally put their differences aside and chosen Cadarache in France to be the site of the multi-billion-dollar, multi-decade experiment. For a year, the United States, Japan, and South Korea have backed a site in Japan, while Europe, Russia, and China endorsed the French alternative. U.S. support for Japan was widely seen as political payback for French criticism of Bush's Iraq War.

At a meeting of the ITER partners in Moscow on June 28, an agreement was released, reflecting Japan's acquiescence to the French site. Europe had threatened to go ahead and build the ITER, with or without the other partners. Japanese Science Minister Noriaki Nakayama said that his country dropped its bid for the site, because it believes "that the ITER project must begin as soon as possible, for the future of mankind."

According to the agreement, Japan will be a "sub-host" of the project, entitled to supply 20% of the equipment needed for the fusion reactor, in exchange for a 10% contribution to the construction cost. Europe will pay half the total cost, and the rest of the partners will make up the balance. Alexander Rumyantsev, head of Russia's Atomic Energy Agency, said that the construction of the fusion reactor will begin as soon as the agreement on the final conditions of the project are signed. ITER was conceived by Russian Academician E.P. Velikhov and suggested to the United States in 1985.

De Villepin Calls for Revitalizing Europe

French Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin published a commentary in several European dailies on June 29, warning that either Europe revitalizes itself, or it will degenerate into a huge free-trade zone.

"Europe is in a crisis," he declared, citing the threats posed by outsourcing and globalization. "Either we give ourselves the resources to build this new political Europe,

or we resign ourselves to making our continent a vast free-trade area, governed by the rule of competition."

He proposed five priority projects: 1) establish an institution for dialogue between the governments and the European Central Bank, a kind of economic government which would deal, for example, with oil prices and common European Union management of strategic reserves; 2) keep the Common Agricultural Policy, but with the main emphasis on securing food supplies at affordable prices; 3) the decision to build the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) in France should encourage Europe to establish one or two new institutes for research in France as well, dealing with physics, mathematics, and chemistry; 4) greater cooperation for common EU defense; and 5) a European voluntary service for young people, to anchor the ideas of democracy and a European identity in their minds.

The proposals are a mixed bag, with the most dangerous being the first, which enhances the power of the independent central banking system, as against the nation-state. The projects all remain embedded in the flawed framework of the supranational EU.

Taiwan Politician Forced Out for Views on China

Lee Hsien-Jen, a leader of the pro-independence Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU), was forced to resign, after recommending meetings with officials of mainland China. His party is a key ally of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party. On June 28, Lee had indicated in an internal party meeting that the TSU was going to take a more "pragmatic approach" to China, and start to have bilateral talks. However, on June 29, he resigned from the TSU, saying that his ideas were not welcomed by others in the party.

In order to appease the radical anti-China sections of the TSU, Chairman Shu Chin-chiang had to speak about the TSU not giving into the "China fever," the term used to describe recent visits by Taiwanese opposition parties to China.

But after Lee's comments on more flexibility toward China were publicized, Shu

held a news conference on June 28 to clarify the TSU's stance. "The TSU has not changed its policy toward China," he said, but "the TSU realized that China's policy toward Taiwan has become much more flexible under Chinese President Hu Jintao and Chinese Premier Wen Jibao." He also said he did not mind party members making trips to China.

Shu said that the party will not abandon its core platform of "One Taiwan, one China, two countries."

Southeast Asia Could Be Opium-Free, Says UN

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) states in its annual world drug report, that the once-leading opium kingdoms in Laos and Burma (Myanmar) dramatically reduced their narcotics production in 2004, and the region could see itself opium-free in coming years, Agence France Press reported on June 29.

Southeast Asia's opium production has plummeted 78% since 1996, followed last year by Myanmar's 23% reduction in the land used for poppy cultivation, and a 43% plunge in neighboring Laos, the report said.

Production in what was formerly known as the "Golden Triangle" drug nexus was forecast to decline further in 2005.

"If the declines witnessed over the last few years are sustained, it would not be too far outside the realm of possibility that Southeast Asia could become virtually free of illicit cultivation over the next few years," the UNODC report said.

However, UNODC regional project coordinator John Doyle said the regional decline was virtually negated by what the report described as "record levels" of opium production in Afghanistan.

The report warned, however, that Southeast Asia was reeling from increased production and use of methamphetamines, and that illicit narcotics use was helping to spread HIV/AIDS.

HIV is prevalent among up to 92.3% of intravenous drug users in South Asia and Southeast Asia, and up to 84% of users in East Asia and the Pacific, according to UNODC.