Fusion Leaders Make a Diplomatic Choice

CAMBRIDGE, U.K.—A Japanese diplomat has been chosen to head the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) project, the world’s most expensive scientific collaboration. Meeting in Vienna this week, representatives of the six international partners in the project—China, the European Union (E.U.), Japan, Korea, Russia, and the United States—tapped Kaname Ikeda to lead the $12 billion fusion project, which aims to build a reactor to recreate the sun’s power source.

Ikeda, currently Japan’s ambassador to Croatia, has a degree in nuclear engineering and has held numerous positions in the Atomic Energy Bureau of Japan’s Science and Technology Agency, the Ministry of International Trade and Industry, and the National Space Development Agency. “He has wide experience and seems to be an excellent choice,” says Chris Llewellyn Smith, head of U.K. fusion research.

Since choosing a site earlier this year (Science, 1 July, p. 28), ITER negotiators have been drawing up an international agreement. Although this delicate process may continue well into next year, an E.U. source says that construction could begin at Cadarache in France as soon as a few weeks from now.

However, delegates in Vienna failed to agree on the inclusion of India as a partner in the project. India had asked to join in July, but sources say that some ITER partners do not want India to have a prominent role because of its failure to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

—DAVID CLERY