

Calls to standardize CO₂ emissions gain further support

[LONDON] The European Parliament and states belonging to the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) have added their voices to calls for the world's carbon dioxide emissions to converge at a single per capita level by the next century.

The parliament passed a resolution to this effect last week. A summit of NAM member states held in Durban, South Africa, at the beginning of the month also called for individual emissions entitlements to be distributed on a per capita basis.

The principle of emissions trading will be high on the agenda of the conference of parties to the United Nations climate convention in Buenos Aires in November.

Under the Kyoto climate protocol, signed last year, developed countries have to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 5 per cent from 1990 levels before 2012. Countries that emit above the baseline will be able to trade entitlements from those, such as Russia, that emit below the baseline.

Missouri wins NSF grant for maize genome work

[WASHINGTON] The University of Missouri at Columbia has won an \$11 million grant to establish a maize genome centre under the National Science Foundation's Plant Genome Initiative — a \$40 million-a-year research project which the NSF was directed to perform by Senator Christopher Bond (Republican, Missouri).

Bond chairs the Senate appropriations subcommittee that funds the NSF. The award, the largest grant ever won by the university, arrives little more than a year after the Missouri senator proposed that the agency should start the Plant Genome Initiative to bolster genomic research in crops (see *Nature* 388, 312; 1997).

The grant is one of ten to be awarded in the first year of the initiative; NSF officials say they are not ready to announce the other nine. The university, the NSF and Bond all say that the grant was awarded purely on its scientific merit. The maize genome centre will be housed in a new life sciences building already planned for the university campus. It will work to enhance a maize genome database currently maintained by the US Department of Agriculture.

Plant genome centre set up in France

[PARIS] French public research agencies and agrofood companies last week agreed to pool their efforts in plant genome research, in particular through the creation of a joint

genomics centre at the Génopôle biotechnology park at Evry near Paris. Under the terms of the preliminary agreement, a new joint research programme would be funded equally by industry, the state and the French National Institute of Agronomic Research (INRA).

Other research organizations will also be involved, and participating companies include Rhône-Poulenc and Biogemma, the plant biotechnology subsidiary of Limagrain and Pau Euralis. The costs of the programme — known as Génoplante — have not been revealed, but will require a "high level of investment", according to Paul Vialle, director general of INRA.

Developing countries told to cut ozone chemicals

[LONDON] The responsibility to restore ozone levels rests largely with developing countries and economies in transition, according to Klaus Töpfer, executive director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

The 1987 Montreal protocol on ozone-depleting substances allowed developing countries ten years before they needed to phase out such chemicals. "This period of grace is over," said Töpfer, speaking on World Ozone Day on 16 September. He added that phasing out had to begin by 1 July 1999.

Ten years ago, developing countries and the Russian federation accounted for just 15 per cent of the worldwide production of ozone-depleting chlorofluorocarbons. In 1996, that figure reached 80 per cent, according to a UNEP statement. The consumption of chlorofluorocarbons in industrialized countries during the same period has dropped from one million tonnes per year to 15,000 tonnes.

May and Craig named as Balzan prize-winners

[LONDON] Britain's chief scientific adviser, Sir Robert May, and Harmon Craig of the Scripps Institute for Oceanography in San Diego, have been announced as two of this year's winners of the annual SF500,000 (US\$360,000) Balzan Prizes. The annual awards are made by the International Balzan Foundation, which is based in Italy and Switzerland. They recognize leading personalities from the scientific, cultural and humanitarian fields.

May has been cited for his contributions to the understanding of the relationship between biological diversity and the structure and functioning of the resulting ecosystems, and Craig for his work in geochemistry. The third winner was historian Andrezej Walicki. The prizes will be awarded in November by the president of Italy.

India opens its third reprocessing plant

[NEW DELHI] India's third and largest plutonium reprocessing plant, at Kalpakkam in Tamil Nadu state, was officially inaugurated last week by the prime minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, who promised the scientists "every help from the government to realize the national mission of nuclear technology". The plant will be able to handle 100 tonnes of spent nuclear fuel a year, separating out the plutonium which India says will be used in fast-breeder reactors to generate electricity.

The two other reprocessing plants are at Mumbai and about 150 km north of there at Tarapur. While the Mumbai plant has been extracting weapons-grade plutonium from spent research-reactor fuel since 1964, the 10-year old Tarapur plant has been reprocessing fuel discharged from power reactors. Two of the five devices tested by India in May this year are believed to have used plutonium that was not classified as weapons grade.

Siberian centres face closure over debts

[MOSCOW] The Siberian branches of the Russian Academy of Sciences are on the verge of being closed down because their joint debt for local utilities is now over 170 million rubles (about \$12 million). Another factor leading to the crisis is that Siberian scientists have received only 44 per cent of the annual budget that was approved by the federal cabinet in Moscow.

In an attempt to save its institutes and laboratories from closure, the Krasnoyarsk scientific centre has decided to give its scientists only 80 per cent of their already decreased salaries. The remaining money will be used to pay for electricity, heating and other services.

Funding alternatives 'won't cut medical costs'

[MUNICH] Reimbursing the costs of complementary or alternative medicine, which is widely accepted in Switzerland, would not result in savings for national health insurance companies, according to a study recently released by the Centre for Economics (WWZ) of the University of Basel.

The study compared adults who take out extra insurance for complementary therapies with those who have only health insurance for conventional treatments. It found that patients mostly used complementary medicine in combination with conventional medicine, rather than relying on it alone. If national health insurance companies were to offer to reimburse their costs generally, says Jürg Sommer of the WWZ, national health costs would rise.