

NEWS IN BRIEF

Stanford's success with colliding beams

PHYSICISTS at the Stanford Linear Accelerator Center California, US, have reported that they have successfully generated collisions between beams of electrons and positrons on the new Positron-Electron Project (PEP), now nearing completion at a total cost of \$78 million.

The initial collisions were carried out at an energy of 16 billion electron volts. Eventually PEP will be producing collisions at 36 billion electron volts, and at this energy it is hoped that it may have more success than the German PETRA machine, which came into operation last year, in seeking the sixth quark.

Although plagued by both political and construction delays — and by the shortage of qualified technicians on the West Coast — operation of the colliding beams occurred only a few months behind schedule. However the delays have meant that European scientists are about a year ahead in operating colliding beam machines.

NSF to investigate handling of MIT patent

THE National Science Foundation is to investigate whether the Massachusetts Institute of Technology has properly exercised its responsibilities in licensing the results of research into magnetic filters supported by NSF funds.

MIT has offered Magnetics International of Ohio a non-exclusive license on the high gradient magnetic separator. However, the company wants better terms; and it has asked the NSF to judge whether the arrangement proposed by MIT is "reasonable under the circumstances".

Under the terms of the current institutional patent agreements between the NSF and universities, the Foundation has "march-in" rights to determine whether a university is doing its best to ensure that the results of the research are reaching the market-place.

The Foundation has published a notice in the *Federal Register* announcing its intention to exert these rights, and to evaluate whether current patent law allows MIT to retain exclusive rights to the patent. A public hearing will be held next month.

US backs off non-proliferation stance

THE US State Department made it known last week that President Carter had decided to support the export of 38 tons of enriched uranium to India, even though Prime Minister Indira Gandhi has refused to

make any commitment to halt further nuclear tests.

A request for an export license for the uranium, to fuel the power station at Tarapur, is being considered by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Under the terms of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Act of 1978 — largely drawn up as a result of earlier nuclear tests by India — the NRC cannot grant a license if the recipient country has not signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty, or agreed to accept international inspection of its nuclear facilities.

Despite India's continued refusal to observe either of these conditions on the grounds that they represent interference in the country's internal affairs, State Department officials say President Carter is likely to overrule the NRC's expected rejection of the license application. They argue that the political stability of the near East is more likely to be maintained by keeping on good terms with India.

In a separate decision taken last week, the NRC has agreed to permit the export of a 625 MW nuclear power station to the Philippines, despite objections that the reactor is to be built on the slope of a non-active volcano and in a known earthquake zone. Three of the five commissioners found that the Westinghouse reactor did not pose an unacceptable risk to the "global commons" of the oceans or the atmosphere. Considering earthquake risks did not come under their mandate, the commissioners decided.



UK unions to make independent dioxin study

TWO of the UK's largest unions are to make independent assessments of the effects of dioxin exposure on their members employed at Coalite and Chemical

Products Ltd in Bolsover, Derbyshire. The unions have questioned a report prepared by the Health and Safety Executive that found no long-term differences between workers exposed to dioxin as a result of an explosion in 1968, and a control group of management personnel (*Nature*, 6 March and 1 May 1980). The Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs has screened 21 of its 300 members at the plant for liver and heart conditions, and the Transport and General Workers Union will check a sample of 35 members for dioxin effects.

In the meantime, the EEC Commission is to conduct an enquiry into 2,4,5-T, the dioxin-containing weedkiller. The Commission, which has the power to ban the use of dangerous substances, was pressed into the investigation by Mr Ken Collins, a UK member of the Labour group in the European Parliament after he received a dossier on the chemical from the UK National Union of Agricultural and Allied Workers, which was instrumental in getting the chemical banned by the Trades Union Congress early this year.

Soedjatmoko to head UN University

MR K. Soedjatmoko has been appointed Rector of the United Nations University in Tokyo. A specialist in Southeast Asian and Indonesian social, political and cultural development, Mr Soedjatmoko, aged 58, is currently adviser to the National Development Planning Agency for Social and Cultural Affairs of Indonesia. He was Indonesia's ambassador to the US from 1968-1971. Mr Soedjatmoko is involved with a number of international development research organisations, including the Ford Foundation and the Club of Rome.

Bondi to chair environment research council

SIR Herman Bondi has been named the first full-time chairman of the British Natural Environment Research Council (NERC). The appointment, announced last week by Mark Carlisle, Secretary of State for Education and Science, will be for four years starting 1 October 1980. Under a major administrative rearrangement, Bondi will replace the present part-time chairman, Sir James Beament, as a full time executive and accounting officer. The change, and the appointment of Bondi, presently Chief Scientist at the Department of Energy, is expected to make the NERC more effective in carrying out its programme of investigation of nuclear waste disposal problems, one of its primary tasks. Bondi will continue to hold his job as Chairman of the Advisory Council on Environment Conservation.