

Science in Vietnam

Soviet Union extends agreement

SOVIET scientific institutions will "participate more broadly" in Vietnamese research projects under an agreement now signed. The collaborative programme will entail close coordination of the state plans of the two countries in seven areas — agriculture, energy, metallurgy, engineering, chemicals and petrochemicals, transport and communications and geological surveying. Special emphasis is placed on the "production potential" of Vietnam and the rational use of labour and natural resources, especially energy and water.

The agreement was signed with full diplomatic ritual on 31 October as the high-point of the visit to Vietnam of Politburo member Gaider Aliev, considered by many as a possible successor to Mr Yuri Andropov. To a considerable extent, it is an updating of a similar agreement signed in November 1979.

Among other things, the treaty continues the arrangement under which the University of Kishenev, which specializes in training students from developing countries, will continue to take Vietnamese. The first Vietnamese DSc at Kishenev was awarded this year for a thesis on fast-growing soya beans devised to allow for three harvests a year in South-East Asia.

Similar training schemes for scientific "cadres" will be expanded under the new agreement, as well as vocational training schemes in Soviet factories and construction sites. Criticisms of these schemes by Western commentators during the past two years as a means of recruiting unskilled labour have been vigorously denied by the Soviet Union, which last year produced a special public relations film, which was subsequently screened by Vietnamese Television, intended to combat these reports.

Under the new agreement, the Soviet side will also help to establish and equip research laboratories in Vietnamese institutes and colleges. Work will continue on a "modern material and technical base" for research in Vietnam, and the transfer of technical documents and research data from the Soviet Union to Vietnam will be ensured. Soviet experts will in particular participate in the geological survey of the country and its offshore waters, in feasibility studies for the establishment of steel and tin industries and for the industrial use of the Da River, and in establishing a pharmaceutical industry.

A major problem for the Soviet side — which is referred to only obliquely in the agreement — is that Vietnamese science and technology, even on its own assessment, is extremely disorganized. Last August, the party newspaper *Nhan Dan* noted that party resolutions on science and technology were frequently not "concretized". The management and organization of research needed streamlining. Scientific information was not being disseminated widely enough and the criteria and regulations relating to quality control were frequently ignored.

Vietnam is, of course, still recovering from a prolonged war and, over the past eight years, much Soviet aid has gone on getting the economy working again. Only last August, for example, Soviet experts were able to complete repairs to the Dalat nuclear reactor, constructed with the help of the United States in the former South Vietnam.

Not all shortcomings, however, are consequences of the war. There have been several unexplained delays in establishing the outward forms of Socialist science. A State Prize Commission was established

only in September 1982, and the Vietnamese Union of Scientific and Technical Associations held its founding congress only in March this year.

An even more surprising gap — considering the extensive aid that the Soviet Union has extended to Vietnam — has been the neglect of the Russian language. Even Hanoi Polytechnic, which over the past few years has been extensively reconstructed and developed with Soviet aid, acquired a Russian language department only at the beginning of last month.

Vera Rich

White House science

Keyworth adds new blood

Washington

Dr George Keyworth, President Reagan's science adviser, last week announced changes among senior personnel of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP). A series of departures has enabled Dr Keyworth to appoint a new deputy director of the office and five new assistant directors. A sixth assistant director will be named later.

OSTP's new deputy director is to be John McTague, a physical chemist and chairman of the National Synchrotron Light Source Department at the Brookhaven National Laboratory. Other outsiders brought into OSTP are Richard Johnson, a member of the Lockheed Palo Alto Research Laboratory, and Maurice Roesch, an active colonel in the Marine Corps. Johnson will become assistant director for space science and technology and Roesch assistant director for defence technology and systems.

Ralph DeVries, already an acting assistant director, is confirmed as assistant director for general science, and two senior policy analysts at OSTP, Wallace Kornack and James Ling, are promoted to assistant director. Kornack will be in charge of energy, natural resources and international affairs; Ling will cover institutional relations and — until a sixth assistant director is named — life sciences.

The new appointments mark a significant change in the structure of OSTP which, until recently, had only three assistant directors. Under the new arrangements, three areas — institutional relations, the life sciences and space science and technology — have been recognized for the first time as separate areas meriting their own assistant directors.

In recent months, OSTP has come under strong criticism by the life sciences community for its apparent emphasis on the physical sciences. The creation of an assistant directorship for institutional relations reflects OSTP's growing interest in reforming the national laboratories and strengthening their collaboration with industry and the universities. Peter David

Sea-cow relics for museum

BERING Island in the Komodorskie group of islands in the Bering Sea, the only recorded habitat of Steller's sea-cow (*Rhytina stelleri*), is to have its own exhibit of the bones of this now-extinct mammal. A virtually complete skeleton, discovered in the summer of 1983 by a seventh-grade school-boy "Sasha" (Aleksandr) Grekov, has been authenticated by the Palaeontological Institute of the Soviet Academy of Sciences and will be assembled and housed in the Komodorskie Branch of the Kamchatka provincial museum.

So far, only six complete skeletons of *Rhytina* have been on public display, in Moscow, Leningrad, New York and other locations remote from the original habitat. The sea-cow was originally named "kapustnik" (cabbage-eater) by Vitus Bering's naturalist Georg Wilhelm Steller, because it browsed the prolific sea-kale of

the islands. The animal was discovered in 1759 and is thought to have become extinct by 1786, due to the depredations of the *promyshleoni* — the Russian hunters who found the Komodorskie group a convenient source of free meat for their expeditions.

According to *Pravda*, the director of the Kamchatka Museum is enthusiastic about the new exhibit. This is somewhat ironic, because if the Kamchatka local authorities had been more cooperative in the mid-eighteenth century, *R. stellari* might never have become extinct. In 1755, a Russian mining engineer, Retr Yakovlev, who had been prospecting for copper in the Komodorskie group, appealed to the Kamchatka authorities to take steps to halt the extermination of the "kapustnik". The appeal, however, fell on deaf ears.

Vera Rich