

AIDS tests upset haemophiliacs

Tokyo

If you were going to have a tooth extracted or give birth would you expect to be tested for AIDS — acquired immune deficiency syndrome? It may seem extreme, but in Japan if a doctor suspects merely on the basis of an interview that you may be infected with AIDS virus that is precisely what he should do according to a guidebook issued by the Health and Welfare Ministry to hospitals and medical practitioners throughout Japan. The National Association of Haemophiliacs last week demanded withdrawal and revision of the guidebook, on the grounds that it may lead to a violation of human rights. At issue is a section which deals with prevention of AIDS transmission in hospitals.

According to the guide, treatment of any patient should be divided into three levels according to the amount of blood likely to be shed, namely, no blood shed (for example, injections, blood sampling, drip), slight blood shed (biopsies, tooth extractions, fibre optic probe analysis), and heavy blood shed (operations, birth, dialysis). If the doctor suspects on the basis of an interview that a patient to undergo treatment in the latter two categories may be infected with AIDS, he can carry out an antibody test, if he thinks it is needed. But no mention is made of informing the patient or obtaining consent.

Yukio Yasuda, vice-president of the Tokyo branch of the haemophiliac association, points out that the lack of a clause for informed consent runs completely counter to the World Health Organization's recommendation issued in April last year which states that even in the case of diagnosis of a suspected AIDS patient tests should not be carried out without the patient's consent. And he fears that the guide may lead to refusal of treatment for carriers and violation of the privacy of ordinary patients. The guidebook is of particular concern to haemophiliacs as a large percentage of Japan's AIDS virus carriers are haemophiliacs who were infected through imported blood products — in a recent survey of 187 carriers, 85 per cent were suspected to have been infected through imported blood.

An official of the Health and Welfare Ministry dismissed the suggestion that the guide would lead doctors to carry out tests without the patient's consent, because, he said, doctors usually explain treatment to patients. But it is well known in Japan that tests for viruses such as hepatitis B, adult T-cell leukaemia and syphilis are often carried out without consent.

David Swinbanks

Indian dam enthusiasm is dampened by Soviet burst

New Delhi

THE recent dam-burst in the Soviet republic of Tadjikistan has dampened Indian enthusiasm for the Soviet Union's offer to build a dam on the Bhagirathi, the Himalayan river, in a seismic zone of northern Uttar Pradesh. If built, at a cost of \$1,000 million, the dam would be 266 m high and generate 2,000 MW of electricity, but



would flood several thousand hectares of Himalayan forest and displace 70,000 people centred on the township of Tehri.

Despite opposition from environmentalists who argue that the filling of such a large dam, sited over tear-faults, might trigger earthquakes and put 250,000 lives at risk, the government has decided to go ahead now that \$200 million has already been spent on the project.

A Soviet team recently visiting Tehri

declared the project feasible and offered to carry it through on a turnkey basis. But a Soviet invitation to visit the Nurek and Begun dams in the Voksh valley, built with the planned technology over geological faults, provides little reassurance in the wake of the dam-burst in that area. A local citizens' group has now taken the issue to the Indian supreme court.

Tehri dam is not the only hydroelectric project meeting opposition on environmental grounds. A \$1,200-million World Bank project on the Narmada is in trouble, and a \$500 million project on the Indravati has been rejected on the grounds that it would destroy tribal forests. Hydroelectric dams have always been contentious in India. Even so, the government has been entering into bilateral agreements in the hydroelectric sector in the hope of bridging the 20,000-MW power gap expected by the end of the century.

A French company has won the turnkey contract to build the \$700-million Dulhasti project in central India. A Japanese-Italian consortium is bidding for the Tehin dam in the Punjab, a Swedish company (Svenska Umentgiuter) for the 480-MW dam at Uri in Kashmir while Canada has offered to build a variety of hydroelectric and thermal electricity projects. But Indian environmentalists are beginning to ask why donors help to uproot people and trees.

K. K. Jayaraman

The Byelorussians had a word for it

London

A REQUEST from 28 eminent Byelorussian writers and scholars for their language to have a proper scientific vocabulary, free of "unjustified foreign borrowings" has received an unsympathetic answer from the Party authorities. The issue of scientific vocabulary was raised in an "Open Letter to Gorbachev", which has been circulating privately since December, and is part of a package of measures proposed for "the radical improvement of the position of the national language, culture and patriotic education in the USSR". The signatories are not dissidents — they include members of the Byelorussian Academy of Sciences.

According to the open letter, the status of the Byelorussian language has been consistently declining under an official policy of switching to Russian as the language of the education system. The absence of a native scientific vocabulary is a symptom of this process. It is not that Byelorussian has never had words for new scientific concepts or has borrowed them from the international Graeco-Latin stock. When the signatories of the letter speak of

"foreign borrowings", they mean Russian forms. To take one example, a 1923 glossary of Byelorussian technical and scientific terms includes *prostakutnik* — "rectangle". The 1982 Russian-Byelorussian dictionary, however, replaces this with *pramavuholnik*, the Russian word rendered in Byelorussian orthography.

The official answer to the petition came from the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Byelorussia, J.J. Sokalau, in a report to the Central Committee Plenum. Although he did not refer directly to the open letter, he castigated the "creative and scientific workers" who have "concluded hastily" that an "incorrect attitude" has been adopted to national languages. "Leninist principles" he said, have brought about a situation where virtually the whole population of the BSSR understands both Russian and Byelorussian, and where no one is prevented from conversing with a friend or speaking from a rostrum in Byelorussian if he or she so chooses. Those who "make mistakes" in understanding these matters, Sokalau said, "must be helped to sort things out". Vera Rich