US tells Russians to keep out of Iran's missile programme

[LONDON] A number of Russian research agencies have been warned by the US State Department that they risk losing millions of dollars worth of technology assistance if it is shown that their researchers have been helping Iran's missile programme.

A department spokesman last week denied a report in *USA Today* that a 'black list' had been drawn up of about 20 such agencies considered ineligible to receive support from the US government because of such involvement. But he confirmed that the government had compiled "informal lists of entities where we have concerns that they might be involved in proliferation activities".

The United States spends around $50 million on programmes designed to steer Russia's weapons scientists towards non-military research.

Among projects the newspaper claimed have been denied US funding is one at the Baltic State Technical University in St Petersburg to apply rocket motor technology to the high-temperature destruction of chemical waste.

Max Planck institutes face closer scrutiny

[MUNICH] Germany's Max Planck Society has decided to introduce a system of six-yearly, discipline-orientated 'comparative scientific assessments' in its 80 institutes, in addition to its regular biennial evaluations of individual institutes.

Performance in a discipline will not only be compared between Max Planck institutes, but also with other institutes in the same discipline both in Germany and elsewhere. The results of the comparative review will influence the future allocation of funds, which will be shifted to institutes conducting the best research. Institutes that prove to be less efficient will get less support.

Russian science budget 'secure against cuts'

[MOSCOW] Sergei Kirienko, Russia's acting prime minister, promised in a meeting with the presidium of the Russian Academy of Sciences last week that scientific research will receive the public funding allocated to it in the approved budget "without any reductions".

Kirienko, whose nomination is currently in dispute between president BorisYeltsin and the Duma — the lower house of the Russian parliament — also said the cabinet will pay special attention to the commercialization of scientific results. "We all need to know how much of the money earned belongs to a scientist, how much to his institute, and how much to the state," he said. The Ministry for External Economic Relations and Commerce has been asked to look into the matter.

Strangway to lead push for innovation in Canada

[MONTREAL] David Strangway, former president and vice-chancellor of the University of British Columbia (UBC), has been appointed president of the Canada Foundation for Innovation. The foundation was set up last May by the government of Canada with initial capital of C$800 million (US$560 million) over five years to invest in infrastructure for research and development in not-for-profit research institutions.

Strangway is credited with developing UBC's research capabilities. He worked previously as a geophysical specialist for the United Nations, with major international companies, and with the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration, where as chief of the geophysics branch he was responsible for the geological aspects of the Apollo missions.

He became chair of the geology department at the University of Toronto in 1973 and president of UBC in 1985.

Societies join forces to seek NSF cash boost . . .

[WASHINGTON] The three major US societies representing biologists, physicists and chemists combined forces this week to ask Congress for a 10 per cent increase in funding for the National Science Foundation (NSF). Paul Walter, president of the American Chemical Society (ACS), was due to testify before the appropriations subcommittee responsible for NSF on 21 April on behalf of the American Physical Society and the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology, as well as the ACS.

The societies want the committee to approve the 10 per cent increase in NSF funding that is in President Bill Clinton's budget request. Their joint testimony — a first for the three societies — is the latest outcome of an effort they began 18 months ago to improve the coordination of their lobbying (see *Nature* **384,** 393; 1996).

...as Congress warned over NIH funding

[WASHINGTON] The Clinton administration and the US Congress have been urged not to short-change other sciences as they direct significant budget increases to the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The Ad Hoc Group for Medical Research Funding, a Washington-based advocacy group, in a proposed 1999 budget being sent to legislators this week, calls for a 15 per cent increase for the NIH this year and for a doubling of the agency's $13.65 billion budget over five years. But it says that "continued progress in medical research depends upon advancements in related fields" including chemistry, physics, mathematics and engineering. It urges politicians to "consider the breadth of this nation's research efforts as interdependent and to fund them accordingly".

Russia and Japan agree to emissions trade-off

[TOKYO] The Russian president, Boris Yeltsin, and Japan's prime minister, Ryutaro Hashimoto, agreed last week that Japanese companies will help Russian factories and power plants to reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases. In return, Japan will gain credits towards meeting its own emissions reduction targets.

The agreement is believed to be the first such greenhouse gas 'swap' since last year's Kyoto meeting of signatories to the United Nations climate convention, at which the principle of 'joint implementation' was agreed. Japan is struggling to meet its agreed target of reducing emissions by six per cent from 1990 levels during the period 2008 to 2012. In contrast, Russia's closure of inefficient industries means it anticipates little problem in keeping emissions below their 1990 levels.

Science writer Diamond wins Pulitzer book prize

JERRY BAUER

[LONDON] Jared Diamond (left), professor of physiology at the University of California Los Angeles School of Medicine, has won a Pulitzer prize for his book *Guns, Germs and Steel.* The book argues that societies that contributed to advanced civilizations did so on the basis of geography and environmental factors, not superior ability (see *Nature* 386, 339; 1997).

***Guns, Germs and Steel* charts the history of agriculture, technology, governments, organized religion and epidemic diseases.**

Diamond is an accomplished science writer and a regular contributor to *Nature.* He previously won the 1992 *Los Angeles Times* science book prize for *The Third Chimpanzee.*

Although there is much prestige attached to Pulitzer prizes,which encompass 22 categories of journalism and literature, the prize itself is relatively modest; Diamond will be awarded $5,000.