

Strasbourg gets the vote for 'Frontiers' HQ

- Japanese government investing in Europe
- Britain and Italy among also-rans

Tokyo

AFTER years of deliberation, Japan, in consultation with representatives of the Western summit nations (United States, Britain, France, Italy, Canada and West Germany) and the European Communities, has decided to locate the office for the Human Frontiers Science Program in Strasbourg, France. The highly political decision, which runs counter to the recommendations of the Japanese government's own academic advisers, was strongly influenced by an offer from both France and the local government of the Strasbourg area to provide funds for Frontiers — the first financial contribution from a foreign nation to the Japanese-led programme.

Frontiers was first announced by Japan's Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) in 1986 as a major thousand-million-dollar programme of international bioscience research intended to repay Japan's 'debt' to the basic research of Western nations. But the programme was eventually much reduced in size and now stands at only about \$20 million for fiscal year 1989, its first year of full-scale operation. Nevertheless, the programme is unique in that the Japanese government is for the first time putting its taxpayers' money into support of basic research overseas.

Frontiers will be run as a non-profit foundation that will award grants and postdoctoral fellowships for research on the brain and molecular recognition to international teams of scientists from the summit nations. The foundation will also support international workshops.

At first, the Japanese government planned to locate the office in Switzerland (see *Nature* 334, 281; 1988) but the summit nations objected. London was recommended by Japanese academic advisers because many academics speak English and because Britain has a long tradition of scientific research. British government officials offered a Medical Research Council building as a possible site. But the French government objected and proposed an alternative site in Strasbourg. Rome was nominated by the Italian government.

At an intergovernmental meeting in Berlin last Friday, it was finally agreed to choose Strasbourg. According to a spokesman for Frontiers at the Science and Technology Agency (STA), Strasbourg was chosen because the local government and people of Strasbourg were "very enthusiastic" to invite Frontiers and

offered "beneficial" conditions, including financial support.

Over the next three years, the local and French national governments will provide about ¥500 million (\$3.5 million) to cover the costs of rent (for the foundation's office), 15 postdoctoral fellowships and one or two international workshops. This represents only a few per cent of the amount that STA and MITI hope the Japanese government will invest in Frontiers over the next three years, but France's contribution will help the two government agencies in their negotiations with the Ministry of Finance. The French decision is also expected to trigger contributions from other nations.

This month, Japan will send out formal requests to all summit nations for financial support. According to the STA spokesman, West Germany has indicated that it will support a number of fellowships and it is hoped that other nations will follow suit. A number of non-summit nations, including Sweden, Switzerland, Australia, the Netherlands and Finland, have also shown interest in joining the programme. A decision on their participation will be made by the board of trustees and the science council of Frontiers, members of which are soon to be nominated by the summit nations. STA's two main criteria for selection of non-summit countries will be their ability to contribute scientifically and financially to the programme.

The Japanese government will begin soliciting applications for this year's grants, fellowships and workshops in the middle of this month under the temporary administration of the Japan Science Foundation, an organization in Tokyo run by STA and MITI. The unopened applications will then be passed to the foundation in Strasbourg when it opens in October.

David Swinbanks

COMPUTER SECURITY

Hacker's intentions key to court case

Washington

NINE months after the event, criminal charges are to be brought against Robert T. Morris Jr, the architect of the computer virus that disabled thousands of computer installations linked by the Internet network (*Nature* 336, 97; 1988). Morris, a graduate student at Cornell University, was due to be arraigned under the 1986 Computer Fraud and Abuse act on 2 August in Syracuse, New York, on charges of "unauthorized access" to a number of computers at federal facilities.

Morris' identity as the perpetrator of the virus programme has been clear from the outset, but he has maintained in public that he intended to only demonstrate the ease with which security routines on Internet could be by-passed, and that the wildfire spread of the virus across the country was unplanned. For a successful prosecution under the terms of the 1986 Act it would be necessary to prove that the unauthorized access was "intentional", not merely that it occurred. Although a number of cases have been brought under the Act, the majority

Robert Morris, pictured in 1988 on graduation from Cornell, claims that his computer 'virus' exposed the weaknesses in Internet's security measures and that the effects have been beneficial.

IMAGE UNAVAILABLE FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS

are still pending, and there is no precedent for this kind of prosecution.

That a criminal charge has finally been made despite the uncertainty of success is taken to indicate an official desire to make an example of Morris. His supporters, on the other hand, claim that the incident was a valuable demonstration of the looseness of the system, and that it has galvanized computer scientists and Congress into remedial action (*Nature* 340, 252; 1989).

David Lindley

Phobos probes provide data for some



MORE new photographs from the ill-fated Soviet Phobos missions were made available last week — this one showing the moon Phobos rising above the curvature of Mars. Although both Soviet probes malfunctioned before completing their missions, most of the plasma data had already been gathered. The planetary surface and atmosphere experiments were the most badly affected, accumulating only some 10 per cent of the data hoped for. *Nature* is to carry a special supplement later in the year with the first detailed results from the Phobos missions. □