Human Genome Project ends 'rough draft' phase

Washington The Human Genome Project this week announced that it is wrapping up its 'rough draft' of the human genome. The consortium of 16 genome centres has deposited around 85 per cent of the genome with GenBank, the public genome database. All the clones required to claim a rough draft are in the sequencing pipeline, says Eric Lander, director of the Whitehead Institute in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He expects that the remaining 5 per cent necessary to claim rough-draft status will be sequenced soon and will reach the database over the next six weeks.

The rough draft will still contain many gaps, which the project will fill by the end of 2003. Lander applauds the progress the project has made, but decries the way public and private efforts have been depicted as a race. "The whole finish-line mentality is silly," he says. Celera Genomics last month announced that it had completed, but not assembled, a proprietary version of the genome (see *Nature* **404,** 691–692; 2000).

Anderson quits Oxford for Imperial College

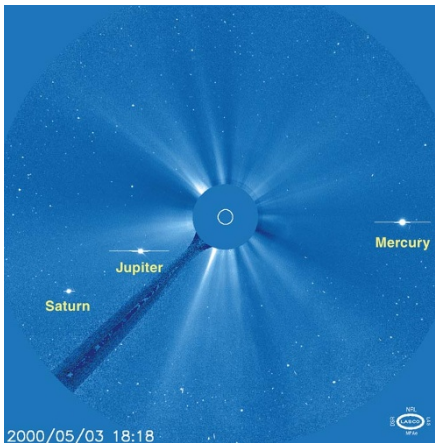
London Epidemiologist Roy Anderson has announced that he intends to resign his position as the Linacre Professor of Zoology at the University of Oxford. He will take a post in the school of medicine at Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine in London.

Imperial College refused to confirm that Anderson would be joining its staff, but said that a statement would be released in the "next few days". Anderson has recently faced a series of difficulties at Oxford, including public controversy about his behaviour over a job appointment in the department of zoology (see *Nature* 403, 472 & 404, 214; 2000).

Planets line up for LASCO telescope

Washington The world won't end. But the line-up of five planets on the same side of the Sun, due on 17 May, will at least make a pretty picture. Calling it a 'line-up' is actually a bit of a stretch — Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn will appear to be clustered within 19.5 degrees of sky. And the view from Earth will be terrible, as our planet will be on the opposite side of the Sun.

Fortunately, though, the LASCO (large angle and spectrometric coronagraph) instrument on the US/European Solar and Heliospheric Observatory is accustomed to looking in the direction of the Sun, equipped as it is with a coronagraph to block out the



ESA & NASA

solar disk. LASCO caught three planets in its field of view on 3 May (see above), and will add one more on 15 May (when only Mars will lie outside the frame).

US agency releases its own web language

Paris After HTML and XML, here comes DAML (DARPA Agent Mark Up Language), a web language being developed by the US Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) for advanced searching and distributed computing. The idea behind DAML is to mark up pages in such a way that search engines and other software can read meaning — and not just content — from a page. Software exploring a site written using DAML would be able to map the meaning of the site to any other DAML site.

Getting standards widely adopted on the web is no easy matter (see pages 112–115 and 117–120). But Jim Hendler, a University of Maryland professor on secondment to DARPA, and one of DAML's creators, reckons that its use will be encouraged as DARPA is making its tools available.

Russian ministry urged not to cut funding

Moscow Valery Sobolev, chairman of the trade unions council of the Russian Academy of Sciences, has written to the finance minister's first deputy, Alexei Kudrin, concerning the ministry's plans to reduce science financing in the last quarter of this year. The letter also complains about the draft of a new law prepared by the ministry and recently sent to the State Duma, the lower chamber of the Russian parliament, prohibiting scientific institutions from keeping the money they receive for leasing out their property.

"Taking away the money now collected by scientific organizations for leasing would be a catastrophe for many of them, as would refusing to follow the law on the guaranteed minimum financing of science," says the letter. "Such moves by the finance ministry, if approved by the parliament, would be the first sign of the coming reduction in science budget financing for 2001, which will only add to the continuing destruction of Russia's intellectual potential."

Complaints force Edinburgh to modify stem-cell patent

Munich The University of Edinburgh last week filed a modification to its controversial patent on a stem-cell technology, which was issued last year by the European Patent Office (EPO) in Munich. The patent came under fire because it includes claims on the alteration of the human germ line. The EPO conceded that the patent was issued by mistake, but said that it does not have the legal right to amend a granted patent by itself (see *Nature* 404, 3; 2000).

According to the reworded patent description — the validity of which will be decided by an EPO appeals board later this year — each of the patent's claims will be restricted to non-human applications. The patent has already been challenged by 7,500 individuals and groups, who have signed a collective objection filed last month by Greenpeace.

Stanford women gain from anonymous gift

San Diego A $20 million gift to boost the number of women in science and engineering at Stanford University has been made by an anonymous donor. Officials of the university in Palo Alto announced last week that the gift will be used to create endowments to support women fellows in science and engineering. It will also provide a discretionary fund to attract and retain women faculty, and establish an undergraduate engineering diversity fund.

Acknowledging that increasing women faculty "has been slower than we would like in some fields", Pat Jones, a vice provost for faculty development, said: "This gift will certainly enhance our efforts to hire outstanding senior women faculty and… boost the number of promising young women in the pipeline."

Physicist Kelly to head US advocacy organization

Washington The Federation of American Scientists has appointed physicist Henry Kelly as its first new president for 30 years. The federation is an advocacy organization that speaks for many of the United States' leading scientists on nuclear weapons and other science-related issues.

Kelly, who works in the technology division of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, will take over the presidency next month from Jeremy Stone, the long-time president of the federation.