Nigeria lays plans to launch into the space age

Lagos The Nigerian government has announced plans for a US$94-million satellite programme.

The initial launches will focus on satellites to improve Nigeria's notoriously poor communications. Subsequent ones will be used for applications in weather prediction and remote sensing aimed at assisting the country's agricultural, forestry and oil-exploration industries.

The government has committed $27 million to the project in its first year, with a further $22 million provided annually over the next three years. But some outside observers have criticized the exercise as inappropriate for a country with an external debt of around $30 billion.

Xenova to have another crack at cocaine vaccine

London Trials of the first-ever vaccine candidate for treating cocaine addiction are set to resume in the United States.

The vaccine, known as TA-CD, stimulates the body's immune system to make antibodies that can attach themselves to cocaine molecules, preventing them from crossing into the brain.

Testing of the vaccine was halted by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in August last year after a related product was shown to cause eye irritation in rabbits. But the FDA has now given permission for the trials to resume, after extensive testing in primates revealed no safety problems.

Xenova, the UK-based pharmaceutical company that is testing the vaccine, also reported that in an earlier trial of nine addicts, cocaine-specific antibodies persisted throughout the 12 weeks of the study. Participants in the study who relapsed and took cocaine reported that the drug's euphoric effects were reduced.

BSIP LAURENT/SPL

Snow problem: addicts using a new vaccine find that it reduces cocaine's stimulating effects.

Biotech firm asks for trials to be kept secret

Sydney US life-sciences company Monsanto has asked the Australian government not to reveal the locations of most of its field trials of genetically modified crops.

The government had insisted that the locations of all trials should be made public by 6 July. But, just hours before the deadline, Monsanto applied to keep the location of 80 of its 85 trials secret. Other participants, including UK company GlaxoSmithKline and two Australian universities, also asked for some of their locations to be withheld, taking the total number of such requests to 111.

Aventis CropScience, a UK-based subsidiary of the French biotechnology company Aventis, agreed to specify the location of almost all of its 283 trials.

Journals open electronic door to poor countries

London Six of the world's largest medical and scientific publishing companies have announced plans to give libraries in almost 100 poor countries free or heavily discounted electronic access to their journals.

The scheme, coordinated by the World Health Organization, will involve nearly 1,000 journals. Access will be made available to medical schools and research institutes in developing countries from January 2002 for at least three years.

Most journals are priced uniformly worldwide. But with annual subscription rates ranging from hundreds to thousands of dollars, many publications are too expensive for research institutions in poor countries.

Participating publishers are Blackwell, Elsevier Science, Harcourt, Kluwer, Springer and John Wiley.

Sect to sue US for right to clone humans

Washington A director of US company Clonaid is to sue the government for the right to continue her research into cloning human beings. Brigitte Boisselier plans to file the suit before Congress votes on pending anti-cloning legislation.

Clonaid was ordered not to try to clone a human being in April after the Food and Drug Administration inspected the company's laboratories. Experiments in animals show that surrogate mothers of clones frequently miscarry and newborns often suffer severe respiratory problems.

Boisselier is a member of a sect called the Raelians. The sect's leader testified before Congress in March that all life on Earth was created by alien scientists and that cloning was the key to the future (see *Nature* **410,** 617; 2001). Boisselier, who says "I believe that one day we will reach eternal life through this method," claims the company has nearly finished setting up a second lab in another, unnamed, country, where she does not expect legal objections. "If I have to move on, I will," she says.

AP

Dream on: Boisselier hopes to achieve eternity through cloning.

Recycled nuclear fuel plans leave Japan cold

Tokyo Japan's attempts to use recycled fuel in its nuclear power plants suffered another setback last week, when the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry released a report questioning the project's economics.

Japan is planning to burn mixed-oxide fuel — made by extracting plutonium from spent uranium fuel and mixing it with unused uranium — in a third of the country's 51 light-water-cooled nuclear power stations by 2010. But the ministry's report finds that the fuel is more expensive to use than conventional uranium.

The plans were also criticized last week by shareholders of the Tokyo Electric Power Company, which backs use of the recycled fuel. The programme hit trouble earlier this year when residents living near Kashiwazaki-Kariwa power plant voted against use of the fuel (see *Nature* 411, 729; 2001).

Europe puts stem-cell patents on hold

Munich Applications for European patents on methods for working with embryonic stem cells are to be put on hold until the end of the year, the European Patent Office announced last week.

The office, based in Munich, Germany, has "less than 100" applications pending for stem-cell techniques, says Christian Guggerell, its director of biotechnology.

It will wait until the European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies, an advisory body to the European Commission, issues an opinion on the subject.

The ethics group last year rejected the creation of human embryos for use in stem-cell research funded by the European Union (see *Nature* **408,** 277; 2000). A follow-up view on patenting issues related to stem-cell research is currently being prepared and will be published by the end of this year.