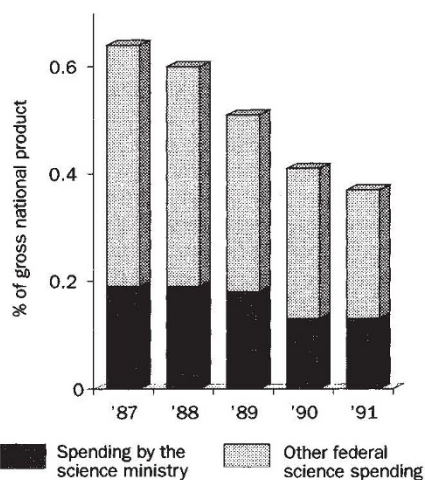


Brazil's science budget looks good — on paper

São Paulo. Brazil's Ministry of Science and Technology has been allocated the equivalent of nearly US\$1 billion this year, but that record level of spending masks accounting tricks and a continuing decline in the proportion of the gross national product being invested in science.

For Brazilian scientists, the government's 1993 budget — which was delayed several months because of the political crisis that led to the impeachment of the president, Fernando Collor de Mello — sends a mixed message. Although it is about 15 per cent

A shrinking commitment to science



larger than last year, it offers no guarantees that the money will actually be spent on science. Last year, for example, nearly half of the budget was transferred to other sectors or swallowed up by inflation, and only recently the programme that funds graduate students reported that it was unable to pay the monthly stipends in April because of delays in receiving its allocation.

The Brazilian Society for the Progress of Science believes that the budget is a reasonable one, given the country's economic difficulties and the commitment of the new president, Itamar Franco, to invest in social programmes. But science minister José Israel Vargas is rumoured to be contemplating resignation out of frustration.

Vargas's priority this year is to finish the so-called 'strategic projects' he inherited and to reverse three years of budgetary neglect. For example, the synchrotron laboratory near Campinas, under construction since 1987, was supposed to be ready last year; under the new budget it will be completed by the end of 1994.

Computer science is another area that Vargas wants to encourage. The budget includes more money for the National Laboratory for Scientific Computing, which hopes by the end of next year to move from Rio de Janeiro to a larger facility with a supercomputer in Petrópolis. Resources for a Centre for Informatics Technology were increased by 45 per cent, and a programme called Softex-2000 is intended to create a thousand companies by the end of the century producing software for export.

Brazil's burgeoning space programme will also receive a boost in the current budget. In February the first indigenous Brazilian satellite was launched by a rocket designed by a US company, Orbital Sciences Corporation (see *Nature* 360, 290; 1992), and there are plans for its successor, also a data-collecting satellite, to be launched by a domestic rocket from the new space centre at Alcântara.

Its success depends in part on Brazil's ability to overcome the suspicions of industrial countries that the rocket is designed to launch ballistic missiles as well as domestic satellites. Those countries have imposed a boycott on exports to Brazil on the grounds that the programme violates an international regime to limit the proliferation of missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons.

Last week, Franco took steps to calm those fears by announcing the creation of a space agency independent of the military. The new agency will have its own budget and hire its own staff, unlike its predecessor, which coordinated the activities of the science ministry and the Air Force but which was linked to the general staff of the armed forces. The opening paragraph in the law that creates the new Brazilian Space Agency declares its civilian status.

Vargas is also hoping to put additional resources into a joint project with China to develop two remote-sensing satellites. Little progress has been made since the agreement was signed in 1988, and Brazil has not yet put up its US\$20-million share of the US\$56-million project. The civilian National Institute for Space Research is hoping that a new drought in the country's north-eastern region will spur investment in its Centre for Weather Prediction and Climate Studies, another project on Vargas's list.

Other ministries, state companies and banks spend even more on science and technology than does the science ministry. But the budgets of the other ministries have been falling at a greater rate than the science ministry's as a proportion of the country's gross national product, and this year's budget seems likely to continue that trend.

Ricardo Bonalume

NEWS IN BRIEF

Tokyo. Despite persistent charges of mismanagement and financial irregularities at the top of the World Health Organization (WHO), Japan's Hiroshi Nakajima was reelected last week to a second five-year term as its head. In January, Nakajima survived an attempt by his former deputy director, Mohammed Abdelmoumene of Algeria to unseat him (see *Nature* 361, 290; 1993), and his reappointment has been confirmed by the general assembly by a vote of 93 to 58, the narrowest margin in the organization's history. In the interim, a report provided evidence of questionable WHO contracts being awarded to organizations with close ties to some of those who voted for Nakajima. Japanese government officials expressed relief at last week's vote, but admit the result is "not entirely satisfying". Nakajima is the first Japanese to lead a UN agency. **D.S.**

Washington. Roger Herdman, a former medical researcher and veteran health policy analyst, has been elected director of the US Office of Technology Assessment (OTA), succeeding John Gibbons, who in January became science adviser to US President Bill Clinton. Herdman joined OTA in 1984 as assistant director of its division of health and life sciences, and since January has been acting director of the congressional agency. Previously he was a vice president of Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York City and director of public health for the state of New York. He holds an MD degree from Yale University and has been a professor of paediatrics, specializing in children's kidney diseases, at Albany Medical College. Herdman led one of three divisions at OTA, which has an annual budget of \$21 million to conduct studies for Congress on a range of technology issues. **J.M.**

Washington. Marc Brodsky, a staff scientist at the IBM Thomas J. Watson Research Center, has been chosen as director and chief executive officer of the American Institute of Physics (AIP). Brodsky



Marc Brodsky

replaces Kenneth Ford, who will retire on 31 October after nearly seven years as the head of AIP. Brodsky, a physicist who has worked on the technology of semiconductors, joined IBM in 1968 and was head of technical planning for the company's research division before spending last year studying critical manufacturing technologies for the US Commerce Department. AIP is composed of 10 member societies with a combined membership of about 100,000. **J.M.**