about a huge reduction in global mercury pollution.

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Getting rid of mosquitoes

Sir—I read with interest the News report “Consortium aims to revive sterile-mosquito project” (*Nature* **389**, 6; 1997).

I was a member of the Advisory Group established by the World Health Organization (WHO) to plan, coordinate and oversee feasibility studies on genetic manipulation of three major mosquito vectors of human disease (*Aedes aegypti*, *Anopheles stephensi* and *Culex fatigans*) in Delhi, India, during the early 1970s.

A good deal of useful data were collected

on the field biology and ecology of the target species and on small-scale field releases of appropriate genetic mechanisms including sterile-insect technique (SIT). But the Delhi project was terminated prematurely for political reasons. Consequently, the concept of the use of genetic control of mosquitoes was not adequately evaluated. Until proved otherwise, the use of classical genetic methods including SIT cannot and should not be written off. I therefore applaud the latest effort to revisit and possibly to resurrect this field. I should like, however, to make the following comments:

(1) The suggestion that spending \$9 million “just once [would] eliminate malaria forever using SIT” is erroneous. SIT control of “urban island” populations of *A. stephensi* in South India may well be possible, but it will certainly not be a one-off ‘magic bullet’.

(2) One major lesson learned from WHO-sponsored field releases in India was that mosquito immigration from surrounding areas was an important factor. Thus the statement attributed to Christopher Curtis that “If we get rid of *A. stephensi* in towns using SIT, no replacement is possible and the area can remain free of malaria forever” may be unrealistic.

(3) Female monogamy is not a requirement for successful application of SIT.

(4) The price of \$12 million “needed to start the project” may be over-ambitious, particularly in view of the “Multinational Initiative in Malaria” being established by the world’s foremost funding agencies.

Nevertheless, in view of the scientific infrastructure, the facilities, a sufficiently trained workforce and the high incidence of malaria, India still provides perhaps the best place to test the premise of genetic control for disease prevention.

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Funding fault

Sir—Sir Hermann Bondi refers to the waste of time when there are too many claimants for available funding (*Nature* **388**, 709; 1997). If ten claimants each apply to the same ten sources of funding and they each score one success and nine failures, this shows not that there are too many scientists but that the funding system is in need of reform.

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