Russia pays researchers' salaries at last, but science still ailing

Moscow. The Russian government has belatedly paid up its 266 billion rubles (US$55 million) owing to the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS) to cover unpaid salaries for academy scientists for the past three months. But the scientists fear that the payment, as well as an additional R5 billion 'goodwill bonus', will still be insufficient to reverse the decline in Russia's scientific fortunes.

Yuri Osipov, president of the academy, has described the money as a "social allowance", and warns that Russian science "will die" unless its financing is "substantially increased". Addressing a press conference in Moscow last week, he said that the material resources of the academy's research institutes were "totally exhausted". Osipov added: "The money we have got should be considered as social allowance rather than salary, as it is practically impossible to carry out scientific research."

Valentin Koptyug, chairman of the Siberian branch of the academy, said that despite a sevenfold drop in funding over the past four years, he had lost only 8,639 out of 66,102 research staff. The academy was devoting all its energy to ensuring that it did not "miss the major target of the day: to preserve the scientific environment in the country until better times arrive", said Koptyug. □

UK embryo authority apologizes

London. Britain's Human Fertilization and Embryology Authority (HFEA) has apologized to a group of French researchers for wrongly claiming that they had withdrawn a study suggesting that mice born from frozen embryos had differences in morphology and behaviour.

The HFEA published a report in December last year which suggested extending to ten years the period allowed for the storage of embryos. The report cited an unnamed "French study" whose conclusions, it alleged, "have been withdrawn" by the authors. But a spokeswoman for HFEA said that the authority now acknowledges that the conclusions of the study by Pierre Roubertoux, professor of genetics, neurogenetics and behaviour at the University of Paris, and his colleagues were not withdrawn.

After the publication of his results. Roubertoux acknowledged that none of them gave cause for concern about the safety of embryo freezing techniques (see *Nature* **373**, 553; 1995). The researchers found that cryopreservation caused no "major anomalies". □

Japan links up with Mir in space

Tokyo. The National Space Agency of Japan (NASDA) and the Russian Space Agency (RSA) signed an agreement on 12 March, under which RSA will facilitate the implementation of NASDA experiments on board the Russian Mir space station. NASDA is carrying out these experiments as part of its preparations for the completion of its own Japan Experimental Module (JEM) for the US space station.

Under the agreement, which NASDA says is the first between the two agencies, RSA will facilitate experiments on long-term monitoring of cosmic radiation and the cellular and genetic effects of such radiation. Studies will also be undertaken on the growth of microflora in microgravity environments, in order to obtain data relevant to the prevention of microorganism contamination of on-board equipment and maintaining a healthy environment. □

Boost for Russian Internet access

Moscow. George Soros, the US philanthropist, has agreed with the Russian government to provide access to the Internet for 30 Russian universities located outside Moscow and St Petersburg.

Following a meeting with Viktor Chernomyrdin, the Russian