

Board lifts its threat to tenure at University of Minnesota

Washington. The board of regents of the University of Minnesota has withdrawn a controversial proposal that faculty members had feared would have undermined security of tenure for the 3,000 tenured academics at the university.

Faculty members at the university had vigorously opposed changes in the tenure rules proposed by the board in September, and threatened to form a trade union. The proposals would have established new sets of circumstances — such as the abolition of programmes — under which tenured staff could lose their jobs.

The board has now said that it will impose the changes at the small law school, which has voted not to form a union. But Tom Reagan, chair of the board, said that, for the rest of the university, “we will not be revisiting the tenure code for at least a year and a half, and probably never”. □

Meteorite meeting in Japan

Washington. Japanese scientists are to meet tomorrow (22 November) at the National Institute of Polar Research in Tokyo to consider how the nation's large Antarctic meteorite collection can be used to help answer the question of past life on Mars. Japanese science officials promised to cooperate with the United States in such research when they met President Bill Clinton in August at the time of the announcement about life on Mars by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. But no strategy has yet been formulated, says Akira Shimoyama of the University of Tsukuba.

Japan's polar institute houses some 9,000 Antarctic meteorites — more than exist in the US collection. Although only two are known to come from Mars, nearly half the collection has yet to be classified,

according to Shimoyama, due to limited manpower. Japanese collectors are expected to gather another 2,000 to 3,000 meteorites from Antarctica next year, he says. The symposium will address current scientific knowledge of the existing collection and of martian meteorites in general, as well as how Japan's two martian rocks should be studied. □

Europe reviews CJD surveillance

London. The European Commission is planning to hold a meeting next month in a bid to thrash out a common system for reporting cases of Creutzfeldt–Jakob disease (CJD). The move follows the completion of a survey by the commission that reveals shortcomings in CJD surveillance networks in the European Union.

The survey shows that comparison of CJD data throughout Europe has been made “difficult” by the many different methods used by member states to diagnose and report cases (moreover, while 11 countries had surveillance systems at the time of the survey, only five had in 1990). The survey concludes that these produce data that are “too disparate to allow an overall analysis of the cases”, and that it is “urgent” to introduce a more systematic approach. The meeting will include heads of national CJD surveillance networks and health officials. □

Pakistan's science minister

London. Pakistan has appointed a new science minister, for the second time in three months. Abida Hussain, a former diplomat, takes over from Nawaz Khokhar, who was sacked earlier this month by President Farooq Leghari, along with the rest of the government of prime minister Benazir Bhutto, on charges of corruption. Khokhar was arrested by police last week and charged with fraud.

The science minister's post remained vacant for three years before Khokhar's surprise appointment in a cabinet reshuffle earlier

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this year. Bhutto is widely believed to have rewarded him with the ministerial post when he left the main opposition Muslim League to join her ruling Pakistan People's Party. His successor, Hussain, Pakistan's former ambassador to Washington, may have to relinquish the job herself in less than three months. Elections are scheduled for next February. □

Israel sets up science committee

Jerusalem. A parliamentary committee on science and technology has been set up to assist the Knesset, Israel's parliament, to address an area that the legislature has so far neglected. The creation of the committee was announced by Dan Tichon, speaker of the Knesset, last week. Tichon told the presidents of Israel's universities that science and technology are national priorities, and that many other countries' parliaments already have committees to oversee these issues. The decision, he said, was made at the recommendation of Ze'ev Binyamin Begin, minister of science. □

Challenge over 'tobacco' sacking

London. A senior official of the Medical Research Council (MRC) who was dismissed last week for publicly criticizing a decision to accept a tobacco industry grant for a study on the effects of nicotine on Alzheimer's disease, is to challenge the decision at an industrial tribunal.

An MRC statement said the decision to dismiss Mary Rice, the council's former head of public communication, for "gross misconduct" had been taken with considerable regret. The statement added that Rice could not criticize the council in public while an employee. But Rice says she has "no regrets" about voicing her criticisms, which, she says, "were in the MRC's best interests as a whole". The £147,000 (US\$222,000) donation was given by BAT Industries to the MRC's Neurochemical Pathology Unit in Newcastle. □

Ebola source identified

London. A doctor in Gabon has been identified as the source of a new outbreak of the deadly Ebola virus in South Africa. The doctor has now recovered, but had already infected a woman who flew to a Johannesburg clinic for treatment last month. This woman in turn infected a nurse at the clinic, who is now in a critical condition.

Health officials are trying to trace all patients who may have come into contact with the nurse in the past three weeks. She worked at the Morningside Clinic in Sandton, one of Johannesburg's affluent white suburbs. Officials are worried that the virus may spread overseas if one of her patients has left the country. □

'Science ambassadors' return

Paris. Twenty postdoctoral or postgraduate researchers from Europe's big science facilities will return to their old schools in 16 European countries later this month to tell pupils about their centres' work. The scheme is being organized as part of the European Union's "European Week for Scientific and Technological Culture".

The 20 'science ambassadors' will represent facilities such as the European Laboratory for Particle Physics (CERN), the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL), the European Space Agency (ESA) and the European Synchrotron Radiation Facility (ESRF), as well as the Joint European Torus (JET). □

Gold medal for flower analysis

Munich. Enrico Coen of the John Innes Research Centre in Britain has won this year's gold medal of the European Molecular Biology Organization for his work on the molecular and genetic analysis of flower development. The medal, together with a prize of DM15,000 (US\$10,000), was presented at the organization's meeting on 'Frontiers of Molecular Biology' in Rome earlier this month. □

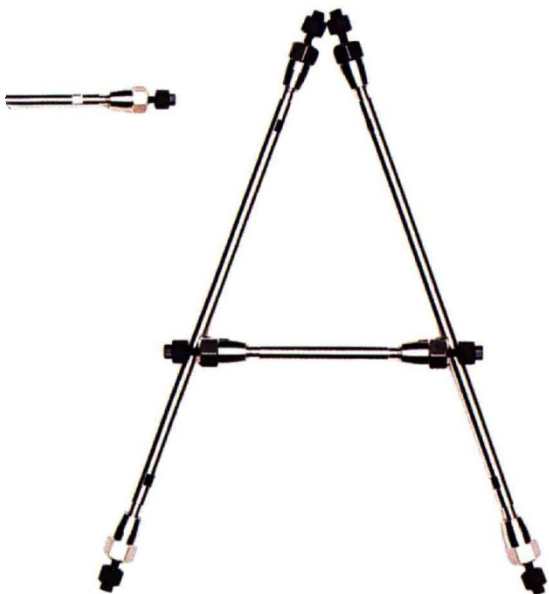
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