

Clinton offers to say sorry for Tuskegee Syphilis Study

[WASHINGTON] President Bill Clinton is to apologize for the notorious 'Tuskegee Syphilis Study' in which the US government withheld treatment for the lethal disease from 399 black men in order to follow its progression and the mechanism of death. The study was conducted by the Public Health Service between 1932 and 1972.

Clinton will apologize to the families of the men and the eight surviving victims at a White House ceremony on 16 May. Michael McCurry, a Clinton spokesman, said the study was "absolutely reprehensible".

It is not clear whether the survivors will attend. Their lawyer said they would prefer that the president apologized in Alabama county where the study was conducted.

Moniz tipped for energy department post

[WASHINGTON] Ernie Moniz, chair of the physics department at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, may be about to join the Department of Energy as under-secretary, the third most senior position in the department. Federico Pena, the new energy secretary, says that he has selected

someone to fill the post, vacated earlier this year by Tom Grumbly. Several sources say that the person is Moniz.

Pena had wanted to appoint a top scientist as an adviser, the sources say, but was told by senior scientists that he should instead place such a person in a job with real administrative clout. Moniz, who returned to MIT last year after a brief but successful stint at the Office of Science and Technology Policy at the White House, was unavailable for comment on the pending appointment.

Wild boars give clue to Chernobyl fall-out

[PARIS] The French Institute for Nuclear Protection and Safety (IPSN) has confirmed the presence of patches of radioactivity in the Vosges mountains originating from the Chernobyl nuclear accident in 1986.

A helicopter study of a 35-km² area revealed contaminated patches where levels of caesium-137 reached 15,000 becquerels (Bq) per m², three times the national average.

The study was conducted after wild boars were found to be contaminated with 1,500 to 2,000 Bq per kg. The maximum commercial limit is 600. But IPSN believes that the risk to health is low. It argues that hunters eating 200 grams of boar per week would register one-third of the agreed safe levels of radiation.

Company destroys nuclear fire photos

[LONDON] Japan's state-run nuclear power company Donen has admitted destroying photographs taken after a fire at its nuclear fuel reprocessing plant triggered the country's worst nuclear accident.

Donen employees are understood to have taken photographs soon after fire broke out at the plant on the morning of 11 March. An explosion followed some 10 hours later, exposing 37 staff to radiation.

Japan's Science and Technology Agency and the police have so far been unable to reconstruct events after the fire. Police sources told the Kyodo Tokaimura news agency that disposing of the pictures could amount to destruction of evidence.

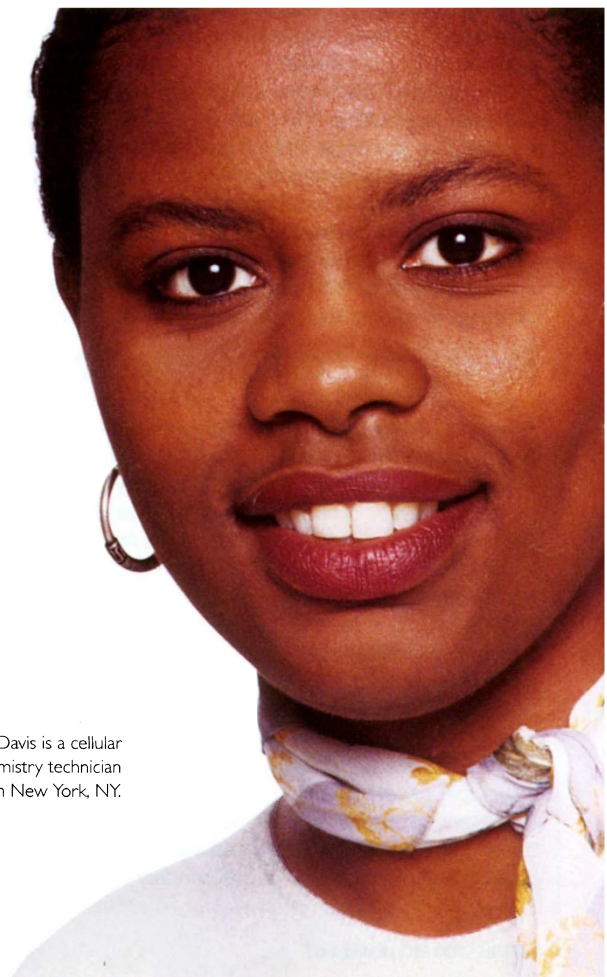
Fossil traders found guilty in exports trial

[SYDNEY] Four men have been convicted for illegally trying to export Australian fossils, in two separate trials in Perth, Western Australia, that ended last month. The first trial, involving David Vaughan and John Bennett, both rock dealers, has set a legal precedent.

The pair are the first Australians to be sentenced, under national heritage laws, for conspiring to export, in this instance, six rare

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Terri Davis is a cellular biochemistry technician working in New York, NY.



crinoid fossils of Permian age from Western Australia to Germany six years ago.

Both Vaughan and Bennett had pleaded not guilty but Bennett was fined A\$10,000 (US\$7,800). Vaughan's sentence was held over to a second trial with two others for exporting Ediacaran fossils from South Australia. The fossils were later traced to Japan and recovered.

All three pleaded guilty and now await penalties. Vaughan is also accused, alone, in a third case yet to reach court.

NASA in deal with Japan for asteroid mission

[WASHINGTON] The US National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) signed a preliminary agreement last week with Japan's Institute of Space and Astronautical Science (ISAS) to participate in the Japanese MUSES-C mission, which would return the first sample of an asteroid to Earth in 2006. Under the agreement, which has yet to be finalized, NASA would help to test the spacecraft before launch and track it with the giant antennas of the Deep Space Network during its mission. In exchange, NASA would get some of the returned sample material and would include on the spacecraft a 1-kg 'microover' that would drive around the surface of the asteroid Nereus. MUSES-C is scheduled for launch in 2003.

Lecturer faces inquiry over Net comments

[LONDON] Chris Brand, a psychology lecturer at the University of Edinburgh, is facing possible dismissal because of comments published in an Internet newsletter in which he appears to have condoned paedophilia. A university tribunal is meeting this week to decide what action to take.

Brand has been suspended since November after questioning whether paedophilia charges brought against the Nobel-prizewinning scientist Daniel Gadjusek were in the public interest. Brand is understood to believe that non-violent paedophilia between consenting partners over the age of 12 is not harmful providing both have above average intelligence and education.

'Politics grounded space monkeys'

[LONDON] A senior Russian scientist has said he believes that the United States decision not to fly macaque monkeys on board the Russian Bion 12 spacecraft next year was made partly on political grounds in addition to concern for the monkeys' health. Attempts had been made in Congress to scupper the mission (see *Nature* 387, 4; 1997).

However, in an interview with Russia's

Interfax news agency, Yevgeniy Ilyin, deputy director of the Institute for Medical and Biological Studies, said he expected the other planned experiments on birds, rodents, and insects aboard Bion 12 to go ahead. But he warned that new experiments on other animals, in place of the macaques, would require new equipment, and thus additional funding.

Soros Foundation gets Belarus tax bill

[LONDON] The Belarus branch of the Soros Foundation has been told to pay tax on 19 projects. The foundation has said it intends to appeal.

Projects in science, education, culture, health care and environmental protection are exempt from having to pay tax under Belarus government regulations. But following an audit of the Soros Foundation's projects, local tax inspectors decided that a documentary entitled *The History of Small Towns in Belarus*, and a project to create an archive of the Chernobyl nuclear accident, did not fall into tax-exempt categories.

A press statement issued by the foundation said that the tax department seemed to have its own interpretation of the terms 'culture', 'environmental protection' and 'science'.

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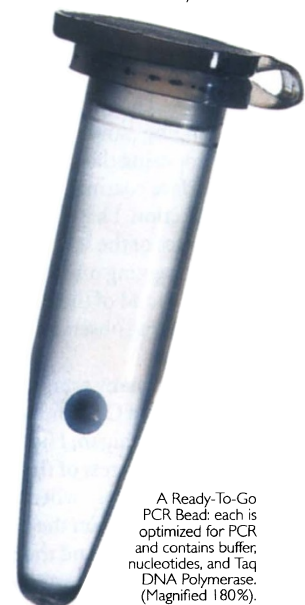
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