

No plan to privatize Russia's universities, says prime minister

[MOSCOW] Sergei Kirienko, the Russian prime minister, has told the heads of Russian universities that, contrary to earlier rumours, the government has no plans to privatize the country's universities. But he has emphasized that his top priority for higher education is the quality — and not the quantity — of the graduates they produce.

Addressing the congress of the Russian university rectors union, Kirienko also said that, if a university wished to produce more graduates than were needed by the state, it would have to find its own resources to do so. He promised that the government planned to pay all the money it owed to universities, and that for the next two months it will cover all their service costs.

Holland hosts school for study of climate change

[MUNICH] A new International School for Cooperation on Oceanic, Atmospheric and Climate Change Studies opened last week in Utrecht, the Netherlands. The school, which is a joint German–Dutch initiative, will develop methods for measuring greenhouse gases, and develop and verify climate models through summer schools, specialist courses and workshops.

Information and computer capacity will be supplied by the German Climate Computer Centre in Hamburg and several computer centres in the Netherlands. The school has been funded by the German and Dutch ministries of research to the tune of DM4.4 million (US\$2.4 million) a year for up to nine years. It will be run by scientists from several climate research institutes in the two countries.

Levine takes top job at Rockefeller University

[WASHINGTON] Rockefeller University in New York has chosen as its new president Arnold J. Levine, currently professor of molecular biology at Princeton University, who is perhaps best known as a co-discoverer of the p53 tumour-suppressor protein. He will succeed Torsten Wiesel, who retires later this year, having taken over the reins from David Baltimore in 1992.

Levine said last week that he was “privileged” to join Rockefeller University “during such a challenging and exciting time for this great institution”. Wiesel described Levine — who headed a major review of the AIDS programme at the US National Institutes of Health (see *Nature* 380, 190; 1996) — as a “superb investigator and

academic leader whose knowledge and interests extend well beyond his own area of expertise”.

Joliot to chair French science ethics panel

[PARIS] Pierre Joliot, a professor at the Collège de France in Paris, has been appointed chairman of COMETS, the consultative ethics committee created in 1984 by the French Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique. He succeeds the historian, Hélène Ahrweiler.

Joliot's standing in French science — he is the son of Frédéric Joliot, Nobel prizewinner for chemistry in 1935 — should “give him a strong capacity to resist undue pressures”, says one former member of COMETS. He points out that the committee covers such politically sensitive issues as the internal operation of the research organizations (see *Nature* 388, 110; 1997), scientific misconduct and revisionist historians.

The price wasn't right for Einstein's letters

[LONDON] A much-anticipated and widely publicized New York auction of Albert Einstein's memorabilia, including love letters to the alleged Soviet spy Margarita Konenkova, fizzled out last week when the lot failed to attract its expected \$250,000 price. The highest bid was \$180,000.

The Einstein items included nine letters, an engraved gold wrist-watch and photographs of the physicist. The lack of interest is in contrast to an auction in 1996 when a collection of Einstein's letters to his first wife, Mileva Maric, fetched \$900,000. The same year, a manuscript of his Special Theory of Relativity sold for \$5 million.

Supercomputer service on way for UK academics

[LONDON] The British government is to set up a £26 million (US\$43 million) supercomputing service for academic researchers. The service will provide access to a supercomputer capable of performing 700 billion calculations per second. This makes it the most powerful computer in Europe for academic research. It will be upgraded to twice its present power in three years.

The computer will be built with private finance, with users paying according to the amount they use the service. The design will be based on the latest T3E-1200E supercomputer manufactured by the company Silicon Graphics, one of the service's three-member consortium. Other members are Computer Services Corporation, which will manage the service, and the University of Manchester, where the service will be based.

US gene sequencers step up the pace

[WASHINGTON] US human genome sequencers will aim to sequence 117 million bases — nearly twice what they have achieved to date — in the 12 months from 1 July, funded by government grants announced last week.

The National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI) said it will spend \$60.5 million at seven sequencing centres.

Dropped from funding was The Institute for Genomic Research in Rockville, Maryland, which announced in May that it is teaming up with Perkin-Elmer in a privately funded project to sequence the genome (see *Nature* 393, 101; 1998).

Mark Guyer, assistant director for scientific co-ordination at NHGRI, says that the funding decisions leaves the institute “confident that we are on target for producing the kind of [completed] sequence that we had targeted”.

Dolly researchers win grant to continue work...

[LONDON] The Roslin Institute in Edinburgh and the company PPL Therapeutics have been awarded £600,000 (US\$989,000) by the British government to improve on the technology that was used to clone Dolly the sheep (see *Nature* 385, 810–813; 1997). The grant, which was awarded under the Department of Trade and Industry's Cell Engineering Link Programme, will support a three-year project aimed at improving the precision of genetic modification techniques in nuclear transfer.

Genetic modification will allow the institute and PPL Therapeutics to clone animals with specific genetic characteristics. Last year there was considerable publicity around the fact that an earlier grant from the agriculture ministry to the institute came to an end just as the birth of Dolly was stirring up worldwide publicity.

...as Japanese announce cloned calf twins



[TOKYO] Japanese scientists said this week that they had produced the world's first cloned calves (left) using

techniques similar to that used last year in Britain to produce Dolly, the cloned sheep.

The joint research team at Ishikawa Prefectural Livestock Research Centre and Kinki University announced the birth of twin calves produced by cloning somatic cells taken from the uterine lining of an adult cow.