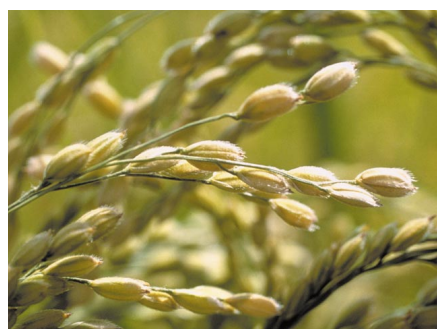


Rice genome consortium will finish ahead of schedule

Tokyo The International Rice Genome Sequencing Project has announced that it will finish sequencing of the *Oryza japonica* rice genome by the end of this year.

The publicly funded, 10-country consortium, led by a Japanese research team, had previously targeted 2004 for completing its reading of the estimated 430 million bases of DNA that make up the rice genome.

But last month a private company announced that it had completed the sequence (see *Nature* 409, 551; 2001).



Fast food: the publicly funded group sequencing the rice genome is speeding up its effort.

Leaders of the consortium say they must finish the project to ensure that the data are accurate and freely available.

Transgenic plant patents get the go-ahead

Munich The European Patent Office's appeals board has confirmed the validity of two controversial patents on transgenic plants.

The board overruled objections filed by environmentalist groups against patents on a herbicide-resistant plant developed by AgrEvo and Monsanto's 'Flavr Savr' tomato.

The protesters had argued that the European Patent Convention prevented plant varieties from being patented.

But last year the patent office lifted a four-year moratorium on applications for patents on plants (see *Nature* 403, 3; 2000). After last week's decision, environmentalists criticized the office for allegedly protracting its decision until its patenting rules were more favourable to the biotechnology industry.

Anthropology book's claims win inquiry

San Diego The American Anthropological Association (AAA) will conduct a full-scale inquiry into a book's allegations of scientific

misconduct and ethical lapses during years of research on the Yanomami tribe in Venezuela.

A five-strong task-force chaired by University of Arizona anthropologist Jane Hill will examine research concerns raised by Patrick Tierney in his recently published book *Darkness in El Dorado: How Scientists and Journalists Devastated the Amazon* (see *Nature* 408, 755; 2000).

The AAA has also asked its ethics committee to develop draft guidelines for anthropologists in the light of issues Tierney raised concerning interactions between anthropologists and the people they were studying. The guidelines will be presented at the AAA's annual meeting in November.

Animal-rights protesters target drug companies

London Police arrested 87 animal-rights campaigners following weekend demonstrations and break-ins at the UK offices and laboratories of five leading pharmaceutical companies.

Hundreds of protesters took part in the action, claiming that the companies support the testing of drugs on animals at the research organization Huntingdon Life Sciences.

The arrests were made after protesters

broke into the Buckinghamshire facility of German chemicals and drugs giant Bayer, smashing windows and machinery. Other protesters broke into Eli Lilly in Hampshire and GlaxoSmithKline in Surrey and Berkshire. The campaigners claimed they also demonstrated outside the homes of directors of Roche and Pharmacia.

UK names sites for transgenic crop trials

London The British government has released details of the next stage of its genetically modified crop field trials, setting off a now-familiar cycle of sometimes ill-tempered debate and demonstration.

A total of 96 new trial sites of genetically modified maize, oilseed rape and beet will be sown in the coming months, doubling the size of the current test programme. The buffer distance between the transgenic and conventional crops, intended to stop cross-pollination, will be increased — from 50 to 100 metres for oilseed rape and from 50 to 80 metres for maize.

Organic farming and environmental groups have reacted angrily to the announcement, branding the separation distances as “pathetically inadequate”.

Indian earthquake raised underground rivers

New Delhi The 26 January earthquake that killed thousands in Gujarat state brought buried water channels to the surface of the drought-ridden Rann of Kutchh district, researchers report.

The new water sources were revealed by images from Indian remote-sensing satellites that pass over the country every five days. “There is no doubt that the signatures we see are those of water,” says Shailesh Nayak, head of the Marine and Water Resources Division of the Space Applications Centre in Ahmedabad. “What we are not sure of is whether these sources are permanent or short-lived.” Teams of scientists have been dispatched for on-site investigations.

Janardhan Negi, a senior scientist at the National Geophysical Research Institute in Hyderabad, says the emergence of old river channels is not surprising, as the area used to be a delta of the River Indus before it was submerged during an earthquake in 1819.

Lake Nyos surrenders its carbon dioxide

London An expedition to tame a ‘killer lake’ in northwest Cameroon was a success, according to members of the international team who



Hidden depths: the Cameroon lake harbours large quantities of dissolved carbon dioxide.

returned from the country last week.

The group of scientists went to Cameroon to install a pipe in Lake Nyos to remove carbon dioxide gas dissolved in the lake’s water (see *Nature* 409, 554–555; 2001). An explosive release of carbon dioxide from the lake killed nearly 1,800 people in 1986.

There were concerns that the team might trigger another release of the gas as they sank 200 metres of plastic pipe into the lake and began siphoning off water containing nearly three times more dissolved carbon dioxide per unit volume than is found in a bottle of champagne.

As the team prepared to leave Nyos, the pipe was removing more carbon dioxide from the lake than was entering through the soda springs that feed it, team members say.