

France's biomedical agency launches plan to combat misconduct

[PARIS] France's national biomedical research agency, Inserm, has set up a Delegation of Scientific Integrity charged with "evaluating the reality of allegations of bad scientific conduct" and making recommendations for dealing with the problem. The new body will consist of a national scientific committee and local 'mediators'.

The delegation will be headed by Martine Bungener, head of the agency's Laboratory of Medicine, Science, Health and Society, and will be able to call in international experts if needed. The delegation has also been charged with liaising with similar European bodies to come up with recommendations to promote "professional ethics of scientific publication". Inserm has also launched a scheme to encourage 'good practice guidelines' in its laboratories, to "assure the quality, traceability and integrity of data".

The move follows widespread criticism of the agency's handling of allegations of misconduct at one of its laboratories. It failed to carry out its own investigation of the affair, while the science ministry — apparently unenthusiastic from the outset — quietly dropped the issue (see *Nature* 391, 519–520; 1998). The French public prosecutor subsequently opened a formal judicial inquiry into the allegations.

Senators attack budget cut for military research

[WASHINGTON] Nine US senators have written to William Cohen, the defence secretary, objecting to administration plans to cut funding for military research and development by six per cent next year. The senators, who include prominent figures from both parties, complain that military research spending has already fallen by 30 per cent in the past six years.

The senators say it is short-sighted of the administration to boost general military spending next year while cutting research and development still further. They point out that half of the US Nobel prizewinners in physics or chemistry since 1950 have been funded by the Department of Defense.

Russia begins tests on 'globe' tokamak

[ST PETERSBURG] Russian scientists have embarked on experiments to generate and maintain a high-temperature plasma in the small spherical 'Globus M' tokamak reactor in St Petersburg. The experiments have been paid for by Japan and the European Union.

The reactor, which resembles a giant globe and weighs five tonnes, was built at a St

Petersburg aircraft works as part of a programme to convert military facilities to civilian use. An additional US\$150,000 has been allocated to continue the project beyond the initial ignition stage.

Japan gets set to build its own spy satellites

[TOKYO] Japan will be able to rely entirely on domestic technology to develop reconnaissance satellites, chief cabinet secretary Hiromu Nonaka announced last week. The satellites, scheduled to be launched by 2002, are intended to improve the nation's ability to gather security information following last year's firing of a North Korean missile over Japanese territory.

Because of Japan's lack of experience in developing such satellites, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party had considered seeking technological help from the United States (see *Nature* 396, 401; 1998). But the government now says the National Space Development Agency will be able to provide the required technology.

US grants for work on Large Hadron Collider

[WASHINGTON] Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts, has received a \$20 million grant to lead US university participation in the design and construction of the Compact Muon Spectrometer, one of the two particle detectors at Europe's Large Hadron Collider (LHC).

The five-year grant from the National Science Foundation is the largest element of the \$80 million that the foundation will spend to support university scientists involved in LHC construction. It goes to Stephen Reucroft of Northeastern's physics department, who will collaborate with groups at eight other physics departments. The US Department of Energy is already supporting scientists at its laboratories who are participating in the construction of the muon spectrometer and of ATLAS, the other LHC detector.

China receives funds to phase out use of CFCs

[LONDON] China, the world's largest producer of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), is to be given US\$150 million to close down its CFC-producing facilities over the next 10 years. The amount was approved at the end of last month by the committee that administers the Multilateral Fund of the Montreal Protocol on substances that deplete the ozone layer.

The committee also agreed to give an additional \$30 million for projects that phase out CFC-production in other developing countries. It also approved a \$7 million contribution to that end from the United

Nations Environment Programme. More than \$900 million have now been spent on such projects.

Research reactor gets go-ahead in Australia

[SYDNEY] Australia's environment minister, Robert Hill, gave his approval last week to the construction of a research reactor to replace the HIFAR model operated for 40 years by the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organization (ANSTO) at Lucas Heights, an outer suburb of Sydney. The decision followed satisfactory assessments of the project's likely environmental impact by three external bodies and Hill's department after the project was approved in principle by the cabinet 19 months ago, subject to a satisfactory outcome (see *Nature* 389, 109; 1997).

A final go-ahead from science minister Nick Minchin to call contracts for the pool-type reactor is expected shortly. At a total cost of A\$300 million the reactor will be by far the largest public investment in a science and technology facility in Australia. Construction is due start in 2002, with operational replacement and decommissioning of the old reactor in 2005.

DNA chips 'bring risk of genetic discrimination'

[LONDON] DNA chip technology could lead to genetic discrimination, even eugenics, unless appropriate regulations are put in place, according to a paper in the *Journal of Medical Ethics* (25, 200–203; 1999). According to Wolfram Henn of the Institute of Human Genetics in Homburg-Saar, Germany, DNA chip technology will be capable of analysing an individual's genetic make-up within a few years.

"It is a blessing for clinical medicine," Henn writes. But it also "provides employers and insurers with ethically questionable parameters for aptitude tests".

US bill offers tax breaks for developing vaccines

[WASHINGTON] US politicians are seeking a tax break for companies working on vaccines against tuberculosis, malaria and HIV. A new bill would provide a 30 per cent research and development tax credit for research into vaccines against any disease that kills more than one million people a year, and for work on developing microbicides.

The bill was introduced in the House of Representatives by Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi (Democrat, San Francisco) and Congressman Charles Rangel (Democrat, New York). A Senate companion bill is expected to be introduced by John Kerry (Democrat, Massachusetts).