

Congress in move to block open access to research data

[WASHINGTON] Opponents of a measure that would open up researchers' data to requests filed under the US Freedom of Information Act are trying to amend this year's appropriations bills in Congress to halt the implementation of the measure for a year.

David Price (Democrat, North Carolina) and Jim Walsh (Republican, New York) were planning to put the amendment to the Treasury, Postal Service and Government appropriations bill for fiscal year 2000 when it passes through the full House Appropriations Committee this week. The amendment would block the White House Office of Management and Budget from implementing the measure, which has been bitterly opposed by leaders of the scientific community (see *Nature* 397, 459; 1999).

It was a similar amendment to last year's version of the bill by Senator Richard Shelby (Republican, Alabama) that implemented the Freedom of Information Act rule in the first place.

Opponents of the measure are backing the use of an amendment because they fear that a separate bill to overturn the measure, sponsored by George Brown (Democrat,

California) and Vernon Ehlers (Republican, Michigan), will not be given sufficient priority to pass into law.

Party marks anniversary of India's nuclear tests

[NEW DELHI] **Scientists held nationwide celebrations for the first anniversary of India's nuclear tests last week. Prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, who had declared 11 May 'national technology day', told a meeting of scientists in New Delhi that the test carried out at Pokhran was a symbol of resurgent India. It "not only brought strength to national security but also self-confidence to our national mind," he said.**

The prime minister, whose government lost a confidence vote in parliament last month, said that his government's strategy had been vindicated by events following the nuclear tests. "Economic sanctions failed to frighten us; technology denials failed to threaten us," he said, adding that Indian scientists deserved to be congratulated for this (see *Nature* 393, 197-198; 1998).

US plan for consortium to seek AIDS vaccine

[WASHINGTON] The new director of the US National Institutes of Health's Vaccine

Research Center is proposing that a consortium of pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies should be set up under the centre's auspices to hasten the development of an AIDS vaccine.

According to Gary Nabel, the consortium would not involve pooling of financial resources, but would provide a forum for cooperative research and for addressing obstacles to private sector vaccine development. "The idea is to break down barriers and to encourage collaboration [to] get everyone to the point where we have vaccine candidates that they can market."

Nabel says he envisions joint research in areas such as assessing vaccine vector effectiveness. Ultimately, the consortium might be enlisted to pursue a vaccine candidate where no single company had an interest in doing so. He marks current efforts by private companies to develop a vaccine as "two out of ten," and adds: "We want to get them well into the higher numbers".

Telemedicine think-tank set up by Allègre

[PARIS] France's ministry of higher education, research and technology has set up a scientific committee for a coordinated initiative on "telemedicine and health technologies". The committee's remit will cover databases,

medical imaging and computer-assisted diagnosis, as well as telemedicine itself. Claude Allègre, the science minister, is an enthusiast of this sector, arguing that it will profoundly transform medicine and create a lucrative industrial market.

The committee is chaired by Alain Carpentier, from the Hôpital Broussais in Paris, and is made up of physicians, physicists, mathematicians and computer scientists. The initiative is being led by Jacques Demongeot of the Université Joseph Fourier in Grenoble.

Science minister tipped to avoid Yeltsin's purge

[MOSCOW] Russia's science and technology minister, Mikhail Kirpichnikov, is being tipped to retain his post, despite being sacked from President Boris Yeltsin's cabinet last week. The new prime minister, Sergei Stepashin, says he does not plan major changes to the core of the cabinet of former prime minister Yevgeny Primakov.

Kirpichnikov is a familiar figure in the White House — the home of the Russian government — because he headed its science, culture and education department for several years.

He is also said to have benefited from the fact that he has not been particularly visible

during his relatively short ministerial career, and that science is currently considered a low priority by the government.

UK lecturers vote to strike for higher salaries

[LONDON] British university lecturers have voted for strike action in support of a 10 per cent pay claim, having rejected a 3.5 per cent pay increase offered by universities. The move was supported by 58 per cent of members of the Association of University Teachers who voted in a ballot, and could lead to a series of one-day strikes disrupting universities over the summer months.

The union says that since 1981 national average earnings have risen by 40 per cent in real terms, yet higher education salaries have risen by only 3.1 per cent. Union leaders say that a 3.5 per cent rise is not enough to begin to close the huge pay gap. Earlier this year university vice-chancellors received an increase of nearly 7 per cent. The first strike has been called for 25 May.

Luc Montagnier's Paris centre goes bankrupt

[PARIS] The Luc Montagnier Centre in Paris, named after the head of the French group that discovered the AIDS virus in the mid-

1980s, is to go into receivership just three years after it opened. The centre, created by Montagnier, was intended to serve as an outpatient clinic for HIV sero-positives as well as a research centre.

The centre was set up mainly with money from Sidaction, a television fundraising evening. But further funding — expected to come largely from donations — has not materialized. By going into receivership, Montagnier may draw attention to his plight and attract new funds. His centres in Rome, Abidjan, Ivory Coast, and New York are unaffected.

China's nuclear weapons now a tourist attraction

[BEIJING] A nuclear weapons research institute, the China Engineering Physics Institute, has been included on a science and technology tourism route that is being promoted by Mianyang City in China's Sichuan Province.

The institute is known to be one of China's main research centres for the development of strategic weapons. According to Xinhua news agency, the tourist route — the first in China — will also include factories that can be visited, including one owned by the Changhong Group, the fourth largest manufacturer of televisions in the world.