

## Shot in the arm for vaccine research as Gates gives \$6bn

[WASHINGTON] Bill Gates, the chairman of Microsoft, last week announced that he has given an additional \$6 billion to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the billionaire's charitable trust.

Some of the money is likely to be spent on research to develop vaccines for diseases including malaria, AIDS and tuberculosis. The foundation also aims to speed up access to existing vaccines, particularly in the developing world.

The \$6 billion donation brings the value of the philanthropy to \$17.1 billion, making it the largest in the United States. Earlier this year, the foundation gave \$75 million to vaccine research.

## US Army funds institute of 'creative technologies'

[SAN DIEGO] The US Army has awarded \$45 million over five years to a new Institute of Creative Technologies at the University of Southern California (USC) in Los Angeles.

The institute will develop training programmes involving artificial intelligence, virtual reality and computer simulation. It

will involve researchers from several USC departments, and will work with entertainment companies to create training programmes that provide 'verisimilitude', a quality or state of appearing to be true, USC says. Within five years, USC hopes to have 200 researchers working at the institute, which will be located near Marina del Rey in Los Angeles.

## Former CIA boss rapped for lapse in security

[WASHINGTON] John Deutch, the former head of the US Central Intelligence Agency who now teaches at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, has been stripped of his CIA security clearance after admitting that he had kept classified files on an unsecured home computer.

The action apparently reflects the eagerness of the Clinton administration to appear even-handed in security matters. Groups representing Chinese-American scientists have complained that Wen Ho Lee, a former scientist at the Los Alamos nuclear weapons laboratory in New Mexico, was treated unfairly when he was sacked for careless handling of classified files.

Deutch's own careless handling of such files when he directed the CIA came to light after he was appointed earlier this year by

Bill Richardson, the energy secretary, to head a commission on the Los Alamos affair. His appointment was discreetly withdrawn when it emerged that classified files had been found on Deutch's home computer just after he left the agency in 1996.

## Academy OKs EPA research on particulates

[WASHINGTON] More than a year after it recommended a large increase in US government research on the health effects of airborne particulate matter, a National Academy of Sciences panel has reported that the US Congress and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have risen to the task.

Following the panel's call for a 13-year, \$440 million research programme into particulate matter (see *Nature* 392, 642; 1998), Congress has increased funding, with a request for \$61 million next year, and the EPA has improved the scientific content of its particulate-matter monitoring programme. Despite the uncertainty surrounding a recent court ruling questioning the legality of the EPA's air particulate regulations, the panel holds the strong view that the research programme into particulate matter "should continue to move forward expeditiously".

## Wiesel to head frontier science programme

[MUNICH] Torsten Wiesel, the former president of Rockefeller University in New York who won a Nobel prize in 1981 for his work on the physiology of vision, has been appointed secretary-general of the Human Frontier Science Programme. The programme supports intercontinental and interdisciplinary research in neuroscience and molecular biology.

Wiesel, 75, retired from Rockefeller last year. He will begin his three-year stint at the programme next April. One of his tasks will be to expand the programme's international funding base: at present, Japan pays 80 per cent of its costs (see *Nature* 399, 398; 1999).

## Police probe 1953 death in nerve-gas tests

[LONDON] British police have launched a criminal investigation into the death of aircraftman Ronald Maddison following nerve-gas tests at the Porton Down chemical warfare centre in 1953.

The inquiry began after Wiltshire police received complaints from a former serviceman who participated in tests. Documents from the centre suggest that Maddison died in an experiment to

determine how much of the nerve gas Sarin was needed to penetrate a military uniform. It is also alleged that servicemen were tricked into taking part in the tests — being told the research was into a cure for the common cold.

The chairman of the House of Commons defence select committee warned last week that senior ministers were not properly informed about aspects of the current work at Porton Down.

## Cave paintings off limits for maintenance work

[PARIS] Scientists and others will be excluded from the Lascaux caves in southern France, renowned for their prehistoric paintings, for at least a year while workers retune the systems monitoring the microclimate.

The Lascaux site, near Montignac, was closed to the public in 1963, but since then scientists or other important visitors have been permitted into the caves five days a week. Before its closure, the site received as many as 1,800 visitors a day. But the excess carbon dioxide created by so much traffic began to cause deterioration in the wall paintings, which date back 15,000 to 17,000 years.

The retuning of the monitoring system is expected to take more than a year. Only

two workers will be allowed in at a time to reset the systems that filter the air and maintain the temperature and humidity. Lascaux, which is the most well known of 130 prehistoric caves scattered across southwestern France, was discovered in 1940.

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