

University College hospitals and where to accommodate a new preclinical school for St Bartholomew's and the London Hospital.

The ultimate aim is to save £3 million in recurrent grant spent on medical education and to eliminate an excess capacity of pre-clinical places. As yet, the university has no clear estimate of how near it is to achieving that goal.

Judy Redfearn

Water and the Third World

New agency planned

Bangalore

Acute, recurring shortage of potable (drinking) water in India has forced the government to set up a national water development agency charged with the task of surveying and sterilizing the water resources in the country scientifically. The agency, to be called Rashtriya Jal Vikas Abhikaran, will have as its members chief ministers of 21 states in India.

This development comes ironically at the start of "water decade" when the quest for clean potable water has become paramount. Nearly 30 per cent of the diseases and deformities in the Third World can be directly related to polluted water.

India is currently utilizing only 15 per cent of its surface water because of the lack of appropriate and economically efficient measures for harnessing the peninsular rivers and streams. However, efforts are under way to draw-up schemes for modernization of irrigation systems. In India, the level of production from irrigated areas has remained low, at less than half its realizable potential. The Indian irrigation department say that the irrigation potential in the country is already 59 million hectares and it is proposed to create another 54 million hectares by the end of the century.

The water development agency will also consider ways of increasing the efficiency of water use, the maintenance of existing canals, and a flood control programme.

B. Radhakrishna Rao

● In Europe the question of exporting technology and expertise to help the Third World in its quest for clean water is being taken very seriously. Tom King, UK Minister for Local Government and Environmental Services has praised British consulting engineers, contractors and equipment suppliers for their exporting ability — exports of water supply plant and equipment alone totalled £51 million in 1980. Prospects look good with schemes such as the Cairo sewerage network and the Khark project in Iraq in the offing. This British expertise has also been examined by Michel Crepeau the French Minister of the Environment during his recent visit to London and the Thames Water Authority. "The Third World depends on water like we depend on oil", he said, in stressing the French interest in the "water decade".

Sara Nash

US nuclear power

Go for Clinch River

Washington

In a widely-anticipated reversal of the policies of President Jimmy Carter, the Reagan Administration has announced that it is lifting the ban on the commercial reprocessing of commercial nuclear waste, and will allow construction work to begin on the liquid metal fast breeder reactor at Clinch River in Tennessee.

The ban on reprocessing, and the delay in the construction of the fast breeder, had been imposed by President Carter in the hope of steering other industrialized nations away from a "plutonium economy" which would, he claimed, inevitably increase the risk of the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Neither argument, however, is supported by the Reagan Administration. A policy statement released by the White House last Thursday repeated the Administration's promise to accelerate the licensing of new nuclear power plants, virtually at a standstill since the Three Mile Island accident of 1979, and to push for an early solution to the problems of radioactive nuclear waste disposal.

Dr Nunzio Palladino, the new chairman of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, said that the Administration was now studying whether or not it would be necessary to introduce new legislation to speed up the licensing process. Even without such legislation, the commission was planning to grant 33 new nuclear plant operating licences by the end of next year. Much depends on building work.

The White House laid the blame for the licensing delays squarely at the feet of excessive federal regulation, claiming that the morass of regulations "is forcing many utilities to rule out nuclear power as a source of new generating capacity".

Several Democrat congressmen have attacked the Administration statement for supporting, in the words of Representative Richard Ottinger of New York, "a Chrysler-type bail-out that will cost the taxpayer billions of dollars". There is some sympathy for this view within the Office of Management and Budget, whose director, Mr David Stockman, has been generally reluctant to exclude the nuclear industry from his general opposition to government subsidies for the private sector.

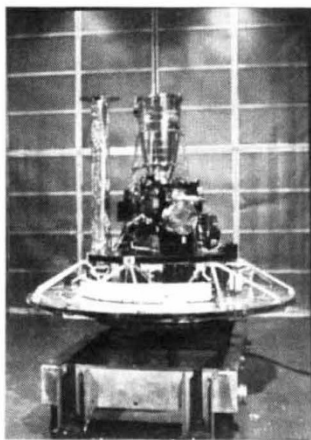
Conflict between conservative budgeteers and the nuclear industry is coming to a head over whether the government should provide such subsidies for the development of commercial reprocessing facilities for spent nuclear fuel or whether this should be left to private enterprise, which seems reluctant to take on this responsibility in the light of current low levels of demand.

It also seems unlikely that the last has been heard about the Clinch River fast breeder. Earlier this year, Congress, which had managed to prevent Mr Carter closing down the whole project, voted money to allow the start of construction, a position now endorsed by the White House.

Last week, however, 25 prominent members of Congress called on Senate leader Howard Baker to withdraw his support for the project and ask for its cancellation on the grounds that it was difficult to defend the \$3,000 million which the Clinch River fast breeder will cost to build when other areas of the federal budget were being squeezed so tightly. Senator Baker represents the state of Tennessee, and his support for the reactor is said to have been the main reason for the Reagan Administration's endorsement.

The decision to lift the ban on reprocessing is being seen as primarily a domestic decision, even though President Carter made it clear that the ban itself was something he hoped other nations would copy.

David Dickson



The Solar Mesosphere Explorer (SME) satellite (left) was successfully launched on 6 October by a NASA Delta rocket (right) together with the "amateur" satellite UOSAT (built by a team from the UK University of Surrey). Both satellites achieved their planned orbits. The SME satellite will investigate processes affecting the distribution of ozone in the Earth's upper atmosphere. (For a full description of the mission, see *Nature* 24 September, p.259.)