

US-Soviet scientific exchange

Human rights still a block

Washington

SCIENTIFIC relations between the United States and the Soviet Union, already at their lowest ebb since the end of the Cold War of the 1950s, may suffer a new setback next month when two of the eight surviving scientific exchange agreements between the two countries become due for renewal.

The State Department is in the throes of a review of the two agreements — one on atomic energy and the other on transport research — and has asked the Departments of Energy and Transportation for an assessment of the benefits of renewal. In both cases, it is believed, the government scientists involved have recommended renewal. A final decision, however, will be based on diplomatic considerations.

Exchanges between the two superpowers are currently running at about a fifth of the level they had reached before the Soviet incursion into Afghanistan in 1979 and the Carter Administration's imposition of

laboratory near Serpukhov, of a new 3-TeV fixed target proton synchrotron which is planned to have a 13-mile circumference. The laboratory already has a major accelerator of 76 GeV. Dr Bernard Hildebrand, chief of physics research at the US Department of Energy, said the new machine would be one of the leading facilities in the world.

One particularly active area of collaboration is in earthquake research. Perhaps surprisingly, the Soviet Government has allowed a team of geologists from Columbia University's Lamont-Doherty Geological Observatory to maintain a network of seismographs around the Nurek Dam as part of an investigation into reservoir-induced earthquakes. Dr David Simpson, a member of the team, said the research was of great importance to the United States and the

Soviet Union had never raised security objections to the presence of the seismographs, which have a range of 10 to 15 kilometres.

The fate of the two agreements due for renewal next month will be closely watched by the National Academy of Sciences, whose members are deeply split about the future of relationships with Soviet scientists. In a recent speech to the academy its president, Dr Frank Press, said the moratorium on relations was "unsatisfactory". It had not changed the attitude of the Soviet Government on the human rights issue and it had deprived scientists of both countries of useful contacts. In a number of fields, he added, Soviet science was at the forefront of knowledge, and many US academy members wanted to maintain connections with the Soviet Academy. "But our members feel strongly about the human rights issue and insist that any agreement must be modulated by Soviet progress in the human rights area."

Peter David

BRL and Gibco may merge

Washington

BETHESDA Research Laboratories (BRL), a major supplier of products used in biotechnology research, is discussing a possible merger with Dexter Corporation's Gibco Division. Earlier this year (see *Nature* 24 February, p.646), BRL let it be known that it was considering a public stock offering. Company officials said then that they felt BRL had recovered sufficiently from its troubles of a year ago (when, faced with a debt of \$9 million, the company was forced to lay off half of its

450 employees) to go public. Dexter and BRL said they would consider a stock offering if the merger goes through.

Dexter, a Fortune 500 company based in Connecticut, produces tissue-culture products and small-volume parenterals and diagnostics. "We have an opportunity to create one of the industry's largest biotechnology companies", said Frederick Adler, chairman of BRL. According to BRL, the new company's sales would approach \$100 million per year.

Stephen Budiansky



sanctions. Last year, the exchanges were pared down again as part of US retaliation for the Soviet role in the imposition of martial law in Poland. The State Department decided at that time that three out of eleven agreements — would be allowed to lapse.

The atomic energy agreement and the transport agreement pose a more difficult problem for the department. In transport, collaboration between the two countries focuses on avionics and air safety. The scientific benefits to the United States are regarded as minimal but Soviet and Eastern Bloc cooperation are essential for the United States to get its way in international air safety organizations.

In atomic energy, government scientists believe that the agreement with the Soviet Union confers genuine scientific benefits, particularly in research into the fundamental properties of matter and fusion science.

A team of American physicists has just returned from a visit to the Soviet Institute of High Energy Physics where they saw the first stages of construction work, at a

Nature index of biotechnology stocks

12-Month high	12-Month low	Company	Close previous month	Close 28 April	Change
76¼*	16½	A.B. Fortia (Sweden)	58	76¼	+18½
23¼	18¼*	Biogen (USA)	21¼	18¼	-3½
8	2	Bio-Logicals (Canada)	5½	5¾	-¾
13	3¾	Bio-Response (USA)	11	10½	-½
16	7¼	Cetus (USA)	15¾	16	+½
14½	6½	Collaborative Research (USA)	13½	10 5/8	-2 5/8
34 *	5¾	Damon (USA)	33½	34 5/8	+1 1/8
37½*	8¼	Enzo-Biochem (USA)	34	37¼	+3¼
28	6 5/8	Flow General (USA)	12 5/8	12 1/8	-½
69	26	Genentech (USA)	54¾	41	-13¾
12½	2¼	Genetic Systems (USA)	10½	10¾	+¼
18	7	Genex (USA)	17½	15 5/8	-1 7/8
27¾	9 5/8	Hybritech (USA)	22	27¼	+5¼
18½	5	Molecular Genetics (USA)	17½	16¾	-¾
27	8	Monoclonal Antibodies	20½	17½	-3
57¼*	34 7/8	Novo Industri A/S (Den)	51	57¼	+6¼

Closing prices are for the last Friday of the month. Yearly highs and lows are based on Friday trading prices. For over-the-counter stocks, the bid price is quoted; for stocks on the American and New York exchanges, the transaction price. Data from E.F. Hutton, Inc. The *Nature* Biotechnology Stock Index was expanded this month to incorporate Biogen NV, the company headed by Walter Gilbert that went public on 22 March. Weighting factors were recalculated as of 25 March. On 29 April, the index stood at 213, compared with 200 a month earlier.

*Indicates a new high or low set during the past month.