

G8 leaders pledge to sign Kyoto protocol on climate change

[LONDON] The Group of Eight leaders of the industrialized world last week promised to sign the Kyoto protocol on climate change by the end of 1999; Britain and France have already done so. The leaders also promised at the end of their summit meeting in Birmingham, England, to reduce “significantly” domestic emissions of greenhouse gases.

The second pledge was made following concern from the United Kingdom and other European Union (EU) states that the United States might make most of its reductions by buying up surplus emissions entitlements from countries such as Russia.

EU member states, meanwhile, are still debating how to divide their Kyoto greenhouse-gas reduction target of 8 per cent. A decision is expected at the next meeting of environment ministers at the end of June. Britain and Germany do not want any country to be allowed to increase emissions by more than 10 per cent.

Germany receives fewer visiting research fellows

[MUNICH] Germany's Humboldt Foundation supported more than 2,000 visiting scientists from 90 countries in 1997, according to its annual report published last week. China headed the list with 177 out of the total of 2,212, followed by the United States (155), Russia (131), India (124) and Japan (93).

But the foundation granted only 464 new research fellowships in 1997 compared with 600 in the previous year, said its president, Reimar Lüst, as a consequence of decreases in Germany's budget for foreign cultural and educational policy. He criticized these cuts at a press conference. “If Germany is to keep up its international attractiveness for foreign scientists, it has to become more internationally minded,” he said.

Molecular medicine to fore in fight against pain

[MUNICH] Molecular medicine is to play a larger role in the fight against chronic pain and rheumatism in Germany. All six so-called ‘leitprojekte’ (leading projects) picked as winners of a competition for funding priority in molecular medicine focus on these two research areas.

“Seven million Germans suffer chronic pain, and one half of the older generation suffer from rheumatism,” said Germany's federal research minister, Jürgen Rüttgers, when announcing the competition's results last week.

The competition was launched in 1996 as

part of a wider campaign to increase efficiency of research spending (see *Nature* 384, 500; 1996). A DM125 million (US\$70 million) fund has been reserved for the winners over the next five years.

France's young people back careers in science

[PARIS] Scientific research benefits from a positive image among young French people, according to a survey commissioned from the pollster SOFRES by the French government to coincide with a national conference on innovation (see page 203).

Of the 404 people aged between 18 and 30 who were polled, 78 per cent considered a career as a scientist “attractive for a young person”, and 91 per cent thought it brought increased social standing and job satisfaction. But one-third thought that a research career was badly paid, and almost two-thirds thought that school education failed to develop a “taste for research and innovation”. Almost all those questioned considered that public research should be spared from spending cuts.

Japan to increase spend on CERN collider project

[LONDON] Japan has agreed to contribute a further ¥5 billion (US\$37 million) to the Large Hadron Collider project at the European Laboratory for Particle Physics (CERN) in Geneva, Switzerland. If approved by Japan's parliament, this sum will bring Japan's total contribution to ¥13.85 billion.

Japan was given observer status by CERN three years ago, one month after its first contribution of ¥5 billion, and it provided a further ¥3.85 billion last year (see *Nature* 385, 565; 1997). One hundred and sixty-three Japanese scientists are currently working on CERN projects.

US report gives warning on overuse of antibiotics

[WASHINGTON] A US Institute of Medicine panel reported last week that widespread, inappropriate use of antibiotics has led to the premature emergence of microbial resistance, and that concerted efforts are now required to contain it. Resistance is “newly worrying because it is accumulating and accelerating, while the world's tools for combating it decrease in power and number”, the report says.

It recommends better surveillance of drug resistance and more research into antibiotic overuse and misuse, in humans and in agriculture. The report was prepared by the Institute of Medicine's Forum on Emerging Infections, chaired by the Nobel laureate Joshua Lederberg of the Rockefeller University in New York.

Whaling watchdog sinks plan for secret ballots

[LONDON] The International Whaling Commission's (IWC) annual meeting, held in Oman this week, defeated moves by Japan and six Caribbean states to introduce voting by secret ballot. Japan and Norway are the only IWC members openly opposed to a moratorium on whaling.

The Caribbean states argued that secret ballots would allow them to vote “free of fear”, but environmentalist groups claim that Japan is lobbying Caribbean countries to support its position, and that a secret ballot would have made this possible. The environmentalists — together with the European Union and the United States — said that secret ballots would have reduced transparency in the IWC process.

Nathanson takes top job at AIDS research office

[WASHINGTON] Neal Nathanson, a virologist and former chair of microbiology at the University of Pennsylvania Medical Center, has been appointed as the new director of the US Office of AIDS Research at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Nathanson will take over from Jack Whitescarver, who has been acting in the post since William Paul vacated it last November.

NIH director Harold Varmus said that the appointment of Nathanson, who has served on NIH's AIDS Vaccine Research Committee, will “enhance our deep commitment to vaccine research”. AIDS activist groups, who support a strong Office of AIDS Research as a counterweight to NIH's institute directors, welcomed the move. “Nathanson is an excellent choice,” says Gregg Gonsalves of the Treatment Action Group in New York.

WHO campaign aims to halve malaria deaths



[LONDON] Gro Harlem Brundtland (left), the former prime minister of Norway who is now director-general of the World Health Organization (WHO), has promised to make the fight against malaria a priority of her five-year

term. The United Nations agency's ‘Roll Back Malaria’ campaign aims to halve deaths from malaria by 2010, and halve them again by 2015. Brundtland's plans were endorsed by last week's Group of Eight meeting of the leaders of the industrialized world.

Britain announced that it would be contributing £60 million (US\$98 million) to the campaign. The United States announced a budget of \$250 million over five years.