

Nobel laureates ask Congress to boost budget for all sciences

[WASHINGTON] A group of Nobel laureates last week urged the US Congress to extend its proposed generous budget increases for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to the other sciences. They argued that broad support is essential to the success of US science in the coming century.

The comments came at a hearing of the House Appropriations Committee subcommittee that funds the NIH. David Baltimore, the president of the California Institute of Technology, told the subcommittee that, while it is considering doubling the NIH budget over the coming years, "it is crucial that we expand research opportunities across the board in science, because the twenty-first century is going to see a cohesion of the sciences and a disappearance of their borders".

Steven Chu, a physicist at Stanford University, said that, although a doubling of the NIH budget is to be welcomed, "the time is also ripe for large increases in the other sciences". Chu won the Nobel physics prize in 1997 for the laser cooling and trapping of atoms.

Brazil ends nuclear deal with India in wake of tests

[NEW DELHI] Brazil has protested against the nuclear tests conducted by India in the second week of May by breaking off a nuclear energy cooperation agreement it had signed with the country. A letter sent to the Indian government by the Brazilian government expressed its "profound consternation at the action undertaken by India which jeopardizes the regime of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, negatively affects the objectives of nuclear disarmament and puts at risk international peace and security".

NASA names partners for astrobiology work

[WASHINGTON] The first 11 partners have been chosen for the US space agency's new Astrobiology Institute, an experiment in 'virtual' scientific collaboration (see *Nature* 391, 109; 1998). Members of NASA's institute, linked by high-speed Internet connections, will work on research topics ranging from planetary formation and the origin of life in hydrothermal systems to the seeking of 'biomarkers' for identifying life on other planets.

The partners, who are expected to begin work by the end of June, include five universities (Harvard, University of California at Los Angeles, Colorado, Arizona State and Pennsylvania State), three research

institutions (Carnegie Institution, Scripps Research Institute and Woods Hole Marine Biological Laboratory), and three NASA centres (Johnson, Ames and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory). Projected funding for the institute is \$9 million next year and \$20 million in 2000.

Champion of Japanese science turns to politics



[TOKYO] Akito Arima (pictured), president of Japan's Institute of Physical and Chemical Research (RIKEN) and one of the most outspoken supporters of science in Japan, resigned last week to turn to politics. Arima surprised many when

he declared his intention to run for the next upper-house election, scheduled for July, as a candidate of the Liberal Democratic Party.

A former president of Tokyo University, and a member of numerous government panels, Arima helped to shape the 1996 Basic Science and Technology Law, designed to increase Japan's science spending by 50 per cent by 2001. He also introduced the external review system to Japanese universities. Originally a theoretical physicist, Arima is also a renowned *haiku* poet.

London museum opens up to Euro researchers

[LONDON] Britain's Natural History Museum has been awarded a £500,000 (US\$817,000) grant from the European Commission. The grant, which lasts for two years, is aimed at enabling researchers from the rest of Europe to access the collections of the London museum.

The funding, which comes from the commission's Training and Mobility of Researchers programme, will allow about 70 visits for up to three months each. The award also provides access to collections at the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, the Chelsea Physic Garden and the Linnean Society, which are also in London.

Kennedy to chair UK's council on bioethics

[LONDON] Ian Kennedy, professor of health law, ethics and policy at University College London, is to be the new chairman of Britain's Nuffield Council on Bioethics. One of the founders of the Nuffield council, Kennedy set up the centre of medical law and ethics at King's College, London in 1978.

Kennedy is also a past chairman of the UK government's advisory group on xenotransplantation.

UK food laboratories are on the move

[LONDON] The British government has confirmed its controversial decision to relocate its main food research laboratory next year from Norwich to a new complex in York (see *Nature* 392, 319; 1998). In a related development, the government's separate Institute of Food Research is to move from Reading to Norwich.

Charles Clarke, the Labour member of parliament for Norwich (South), described the decision as a "shoddy" one, which would damage food research. But his parliamentary colleague Hugh Bayley (Labour, York) said the decision was "right for British science".

Jack Cunningham, the agriculture minister, confirmed that the decision had been taken to fill empty laboratory space at the York complex.

Weapons work at US power plants ruled out

[WASHINGTON] US government plans to use civilian power plants as a source of tritium for nuclear weapons are in doubt after the House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly to prohibit the option. On a voice vote, the House passed an amendment put forward by Edward Markey (Democrat, Massachusetts) and Lindsey Graham (Republican, South Carolina) that would prohibit the use of civilian nuclear plants for tritium production.

The vote is seen by Markey as a means for the United States to stem proliferation by setting a good example to other countries. But Graham and others backed it because they want the Department of Energy to build a multi-billion dollar particle accelerator at Savannah River, South Carolina, creating jobs as well as tritium.

Stargazing company brought down to Earth

[WASHINGTON] A US company that claimed to sell the right to name stars after people has been charged with deceptive trading by the US Department of Consumer Affairs. The Illinois-based 'International Star Registry' faces a fine of at least \$3,500 for charging up to \$100 for naming stars according to the wishes of its customers.

The International Astronomical Union is the only recognized star-naming organization. And it does not sell names. Jules Polonetsky, the US consumer affairs commissioner, said that the star names were "nothing more than a listing in the company's own book". He added: "Customers who want their own star are better off saving their money by walking into Central Park, pointing to the sky, and naming it themselves."