

Science academies pool their wisdom on global issues

Tokyo An international group of science academies is today setting up an organization to bring scientific resources to bear on issues of international concern, such as food security and the control of emerging diseases.

They agreed to form the InterAcademy Council (IAC) at a meeting in Tokyo last weekend. The idea was first mooted by Bruce Alberts, president of the US National Academy of Sciences. The council will have its headquarters at the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences in Amsterdam, and will function as a formal advisory body, funded on a project-by-project basis by international agencies.

"The burgeoning threats to global sustainability call on the world's scientific community to do more," says P. N. Tandon, a former president of the Indian National Science Academy and co-chair of the InterAcademy Panel on International Issues that established the IAC.

In a statement welcoming the creation of the IAC, Kofi Annan, the UN secretary-general, said that the complex issues confronting the international community "demand a bold vision for action involving a wide array of international, national and local institutions".

Germany's mobile gene school goes up in smoke

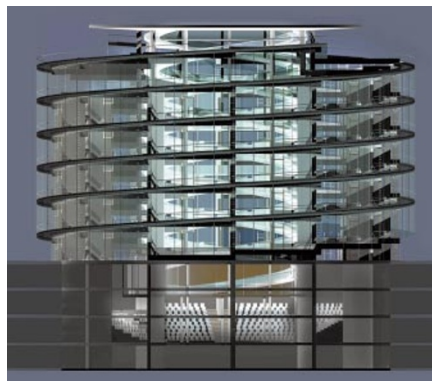
Munich Germany's new GeneTech-mobile, launched last month as a central focus of the federal research ministry's information campaign on gene technologies, is in ashes.

The mobile laboratory and information centre was completely burnt out last week after a visit to a school in the state of Hessen. Police suspect arson, but no group has so far claimed responsibility.

The presumed attack followed a heated public discussion about genetic engineering in the school in Giessen. Last year a similar vehicle, the BioTech-mobile, was burnt out in Giessen, which lies close to an area where field trials on GM crops have been repeatedly destroyed. The GeneTech-mobile will be rebuilt at a cost of DM1.1 million.

Dresden has designs on biotech research

Munich The design of Dresden's new bioinformatics centre will be based on the DNA double helix (see picture). The building will be constructed in city-owned castle grounds near the river Elbe as part of the planned 'BioParc Dresden'. The BioParc will be jointly financed by the city of Dresden, the state of Saxony and the Klaus Tschira Foundation —



In a whirl: Dresden's planned biotech centre.

recently set up to support science by a founder of SAP, Germany's largest software company.

With the new centre, Dresden hopes to move into the premier league of biotechnology and genome research in Germany. Kai Simons, founding director of the new Dresden-based Max Planck Institute for Molecular Cell Biology and Genetics, is particularly happy about the initiative. A bioinformatics facility would harmonize perfectly with research carried out at his institute, he told a press conference this week.

Spain plans to increase access to information

Barcelona Spain is to spend Ptas 550 million (US\$ 3 million) over the next three years on the dissemination of science and technology. The programme, presented last week in Madrid as part of the National Plan on Research, Development and Technological Innovation 2000–2003, is considered to be a priority area and is targeted at researchers in both public and private non-profit institutions.

Activities to be supported include the creation and development of web sites in research centres — to act as access 'portals' to wide spectra of information — and surveys of public knowledge about and attitudes towards science and technology. The programme also includes support for science journalists, including the possibility of stays in research centres.

2003 US Mars mission down to two options...

Washington The US space agency NASA might send an orbiter or a lander to Mars in 2003 — but it can't afford both. By July, NASA expects to decide between either making up for the lost Mars Climate Orbiter, with a probe that will focus on the martian atmosphere and a search for water, or placing a mobile lander on the surface that would be able to travel up to 100 metres a day.

The lander — based on Cornell University's 'Athena' design — would land

inside Pathfinder-style airbags, but would be much more capable than the Pathfinder rover. Until last year's failures prompted a re-examination of the entire Mars programme, NASA was planning to send both an orbiter and a lander at each launch opportunity.

...as France stays on track for mission in 2005

Paris French research minister Roger-Gérard Schwartzberg voiced his support early this week for continued collaboration with the US space agency NASA over a mission to Mars, despite the recent setbacks to US Mars projects. Scheduled for 2005, the joint mission would aim to bring back rock samples.

In an interview published in *Le Figaro*, Schwartzberg said that France would pursue its investment in the Mars mission, estimated at FF2 billion (US\$279 million). "It's admittedly a costly programme, but we can't content ourselves to be a spectator when it comes to Mars exploration," he said.

Readers get access to Celera's data

Washington In landing its first academic customer, Celera Genomics may have found a way to balance its commercial interests with the public's concerns about access to data. For the next five years, readers of papers by researchers from Vanderbilt University, Tennessee, that are based on Celera's genome will be able to look at the relevant section of the commercial database for free.

The university can also seek available patents without paying Celera 'reach-through' rights. But Celera remains opposed to database redistribution. "We are not free to copy the database in any way, shape or form," says Mark Magnuson, Vanderbilt's assistant vice-chancellor for research.

The cloned mouse that roared is silenced

London Cumulina, the first mouse to be cloned from an adult cell, has died — at the ripe old age of two years and seven months. The average mouse lives for only about two years, and Cumulina's longevity will fuel the debate over the effects of cloning on the ageing process. A university statement said that, apart from a skin tumour — common in ageing mice — she remained healthy and active until shortly before her death, "while sleeping".

Created by a team led by Teruhiko Wakayama and Ryuzo Yanagimachi (*Nature* 394, 369–374; 1998) of the School of Medicine at the University of Hawaii, Cumulina was born on 3 October 1997. The impact of the research led to her being dubbed 'The Mouse that Roared'.