

Poles together

London

FRANCE'S polar research programme will next year be brought under one roof, with the opening of a new institute in Paris to coordinate the work of all French polar researchers. For Claude Lorius of the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS)'s Laboratory of Glaciology in Grenoble, who will be the institute's president, last week's announcement of a FF113-million (about \$21 million) 1992 budget for the institute ends nearly two years of uncertainty. First proposed in February 1990, the institute's future became bogged down in negotiations between the ministry for overseas territories (responsible for France's interests in Antarctica) and the ministries of research and finance.

Lorius expects that the new institute's main effect will be on French research in the Arctic — which includes ice-core drilling in Greenland, the French contribution to a pan-European study of ozone depletion, and studies of indigenous Inuit people.

Until now, there has been no single body responsible for running these projects as a coherent Arctic research programme.

But France's Antarctic research effort, already one of the largest in the continent, should also benefit. The programme is now run by two organizations: Terres Australes et Antarctiques Françaises (TAAF) — an offshoot of the ministry for overseas territories — which finances the Antarctic programme, and Expéditions Polaires Françaises (EPF), responsible for running the programme in the field. Lorius says that the division of responsibilities between the two bodies has been unclear (see *Nature* 350, 299; 28 March 1991).

The new institute will supersede EPF and will leave TAAF responsible for only the logistical support of the programme. The centralized approach does not extend to French polar researchers themselves, however, who will remain spread among university and CNRS laboratories throughout France.

Peter Aldous

YUGOSLAV CRISIS

Academics invade Dubrovnik

London

THE Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts is planning a brave — some would say foolhardy — expedition to focus attention on the destruction of Dubrovnik by the surrounding Yugoslav and Serbian forces. Next Saturday (14 December), academy president Ivan Supek plans to sail from the Italian port of Bari, through the Yugoslav navy blockade, and into the besieged port itself. With him, he hopes, will be some 50 academics, half of them from abroad. If allowed through the naval blockade, Supek intends to survey the damage to the city before sailing back to Italy and appealing for an end to the attacks on one of Croatia's most important

cultural and scientific centres.

Supek, a theoretical physicist turned novelist who fought with the Yugoslav partisans during the Second World War, says he had hoped to hold a conference in Dubrovnik's Interuniversity Centre. But this institute, an international centre run by a consortium of more than 200 universities, has been largely destroyed by fire, after being hit during the bombardment of the city.

Despite the obvious danger, Supek is convinced that academics will join his expedition. He says that a number of foreign academics have already agreed to take part, but declines to name them in advance of the sailing. Peter Aldous

HIV INFECTION

France will compensate

London

BOWING to public and media pressure, the French government will provide compensation for some 7,000 French citizens who have been infected with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) through blood products and transfusions. Bruno de Langre, president of the French Haemophilia Association, which has been representing more than 1,000 infected haemophiliacs, says that a bill now passing through the French parliament will free claimants from the need to prove in court that the transfusion service was at fault. French insurance companies are expected to provide FF1,200 million (about

\$220 million) to a new foundation that will handle the compensation claims, but the French taxpayer will bear most of the burden. If all claimants are to be given full compensation, says de Langre, the total bill could reach FF12,000 million.

The French plans greatly exceed the compensation on offer in other countries. But the French government is fighting a low rating in public opinion polls, and allegations that the health ministry failed in 1985 to prevent the distribution of HIV-infected blood products have precipitated a major scandal (see *Nature* 353, 781; 31 October 1991 & 354, 98; 14 November 1991).

Peter Aldous

3,000 lecturers wanted

Hong Kong

A DESPERATE shortage of college and university lecturers in Hong Kong has led seven government-funded tertiary institutions to combine forces in a search for academic staff overseas.

The shortage stems from planned expansion of the territory's tertiary education system, which has the aim of doubling the number of first-year students by 1995. The result is a need for roughly 3,000 more lecturers by 1995, nearly the number of lecturers already working in Hong Kong's higher education system. Although the precise number of lecturers required in science and engineering has not yet been announced, large numbers will be needed to fill slots in the new University of Science and Technology and a new engineering department at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Because the institutions have a gentleman's agreement not to poach staff from each other, they have agreed to form a joint recruitment committee to seek faculty from overseas. The campaign, which began in late November, first goes to North America, with exhibitions in Toronto, Chicago and San Francisco, to which local academics were invited, and then it moves to the United Kingdom. If the two trips go well, the committee plans to also visit Australia and Singapore next year.

Institutions on the committee, in addition to Chinese University, are City Polytechnic of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Baptist College, Hong Kong Polytechnic, the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Lignan College and the University of Hong Kong.

Peter Gwynne

\$25 million for R&D

Hong Kong

HONG KONG plans to spend HK\$200 million (about \$25 million) on industrial research and development (R&D) projects next year. The amount represents a down payment on a new scheme to encourage applied R&D by a government that has previously taken a strictly *laissez faire* attitude to support of technology.

The requested allocation, which the finance committee will take up in December, comes in reaction to fears that Hong Kong is falling behind other Asian nations in its development of technological products for export. The grants are intended to encourage more private sector investment in applied R&D, said Tyebjee Barma, director-general of the industry department. "In return, the government could share in the benefits from commercially viable projects it has supported."

Over the next three years, Barma said, he hopes to increase the programme to at least \$50 million a year.

Peter Gwynne