Wellcome Trust to coordinate drive against malaria

[PARIS] Britain's Wellcome Trust has been given responsibility for coordinating the activities for the coming year of a recently created powerful forum to lead a new attack on malaria.

The Multilateral Initiative on Malaria (MIM) is a loose consortium of research and donor agencies, including the US National Institutes of Health, the UK Medical Research Council, the World Bank and United Nations agencies.

The third meeting of MIM, held last week in London, agreed formal commitments to a series of objectives. Disagreement fuelled by the different interests of the agencies involved had almost brought an earlier meeting in The Hague to a crisis (see *Nature* 388, 219; 1997).

MIM has now formally adopted proposals agreed in outline at The Hague, while the decision to make Wellcome responsible for coordination, for the first year at least, is widely seen as a means of depoliticizing the forum — the Wellcome Trust is perceived as relatively neutral and an 'honest broker'.

In another development, the meeting decided there was little point in developing new models of international cooperation when there was little new money available beyond the \$100 million a year currently available for malaria research worldwide.

As a result, "communication and advocacy" of the malaria problem emerged as the first priority. This was formally delegated to the Malaria Foundation, which is based in New York, but which is considering opening an office in Europe as well.

In a related move, the chief executives of the world's biggest pharmaceutical companies meet tomorrow (21 November) to consider a proposal supported by the World Health Organization, the Wellcome Trust and other organizations which is aimed at developing a private-sector-backed international structure to restart research into antimalarial drugs.

Declan Butler

Greenhouse emission cuts 'in China's own interests'

[LONDON] Leading climate scientists in China have concluded that the country's long-term economic and environmental interests would be best served by reducing greenhouse-gas emissions — even though they remain "considerably less pessimistic" about the effects of climate change than their counterparts in the United Nations climate panel.

"Half of China's motive for reducing carbon dioxide emissions is to protect the country from rising sea levels," says Ren Zhenqiu, a member of the China Academy of Meteorological Sciences. "The other half is to fulfil our obligations to countries like the United States, even if this is at the cost of giving up the benefits of global warming to China. This should be the basis of China's policy of reducing carbon dioxide emissions and participating in international negotiations."

Ren's comments appear in a three-volume report on Chinese climate research, an English summary of which was released on the Internet by the US Embassy in Beijing earlier this month (<http://www.redfish.com/USEmbassy-China/sandt/CLCHNG.HTM>). The volumes have been published over the past five years by 150 researchers from the Chinese Academy of Sciences and other agencies.

Although the three climate change volumes are written by scientists, not policy-makers, they are seen as an indication of how China's policy-makers are thinking. Chinese scientists recognize global warming has benefits as well as costs. The authors point out that China has experienced global warming before. Ren is quoted as saying that 4,000–8,000 years ago, China was 2–4 °C warmer than today. Sea levels were 1–3 metres higher, and there was 20–40 per cent more rainfall.

Although a warmer, wetter climate would benefit agriculture in some parts of China, the

authors recognize that increased greenhouse emissions would deplete the country's fossil-fuel base, as well as threatening coastal states.

But their reports also emphasize that for China, development has traditionally taken priority over environmental protection. This was also effectively the message contained in a speech last month in Beijing by Song Jian, a scientist who is also leader of the environment group in China's ruling State Council.

Song said China was committed to reducing greenhouse-gas emissions, but not if it meant depriving people of refrigerators "or those who live at temperatures of 40 °C of air-conditioning". He nevertheless indicated that China would cut emissions by increased use of renewable energy, afforestation and lower population growth, which he described as "the decisive guarantee of protecting the climate and environment". He hinted that China favoured reducing greenhouse-gas emissions on a per capita basis (see page 217).

One observer of China's environment policy says "Song Jian is a distinguished scientist as well as an important Chinese official, and one would do well to pay great attention to what he says."

Ehsan Masood

More motor vehicles in China means increasing carbon emissions — and blocked bicycle lanes.

MIKE FIALA/AP

French agency agrees to publication of asbestos report

[PARIS] INSERM, the French national biomedical research agency, is to publish as a book a controversial report by an expert panel on the risks of asbestos. An earlier decision to make the report 'publicly available' was criticized on the grounds that it relegated the report to the status of 'grey' literature.

Claude Allègre, the research minister and an outspoken critic of the report, has strongly refuted allegations that formal publication of the report had been blocked by INSERM on the instructions of his

ministry (see *Nature* 389, 649; 1997). "Why would I have opposed distribution of a text of mediocre quality?" he asked at a recent press conference. INSERM has played down the allegations as "a storm in a teacup."

INSERM now claims that the eventual publication of the report had always been a possibility. But a letter sent last month by Jean Marimbert, head of the ministry's department of labour relations, to Claude Griscelli, director general of INSERM, states that during a meeting "INSERM

representatives stated their decision not to publish at INSERM Editions the final report."

The letter goes on to demand that INSERM reverse this decision. Relegating the report to 'grey' literature would "damage the scientific credibility of a study that was decisive for the public authorities," says the letter, and would strengthen the hand of those opposed to the ban on asbestos introduced following the release in July 1996 of the report's conclusions in their preliminary form.

D.B.