

## British government acts to protect Internet providers against libel

**London.** The British government has introduced a bill into the House of Lords designed to protect 'innocent' Internet-providers from being sued for defamatory material that passes through or is held on bulletin boards. The new procedures, introduced by Lord Mackay, the Lord Chancellor, includes a defence of 'innocent dissemination'. The bill would also increase libel protection for the printing industry, as well as for shops selling newspapers and magazines that unwittingly help to disseminate defamatory material.

Legislation was first suggested seven months ago, when Britain's first Internet libel case was settled out of court (see *Nature* 375, 525; 1995). Laurence Godfrey, a physics lecturer, had secured a payment from another physicist for posting allegedly libellous remarks on the news group, Usenet.

Godfrey had said he would also sue several Internet providers who had allowed the remarks to remain on bulletin boards despite requests for their removal. Two providers in the United States apparently refused as they regard interference on the Internet as a violation of freedom of speech. □

## Lenses endow neuroscience at MIT

**Boston.** Menicon Co. Ltd, a Japanese manufacturer of contact lenses in Japan, announced last week that it is to endow a professorship in neuroscience at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

A \$2.5-million grant from the company will be used to recruit a professor to the MIT Center for Learning and Memory that is headed by the Nobel laureate, Susumu Tonegawa. Kyoichi Tanaka, president of Menicon, has described learning and memory as "a very exciting new field in brain and cognitive sciences", adding his belief that "Tonegawa's centre will make significant discoveries that will be of benefit to people around the world. This is why

Menicon decided to take this unusual initiative."

The announcement has been welcomed by Emilio Bizzi, head of the department of brain and cognitive sciences, which provides three faculty positions for the centre for learning and memory. The centre has temporary space in the department of brain and cognitive sciences, and in a couple of years MIT will provide the centre with its own accommodation. □

## Trilateral marine missions agreed

**Munich.** Germany, France and Britain this week signed an agreement to combine their marine research facilities, including 15 research vessels of various sizes, in order to contribute more efficiently to the expensive business of deep-sea research. This will mean that German, French and British scientists may join any of the ships' missions, all of which will be advertised in the three countries, and share each vessel's specialized equipment. □

## Calgene survives patent challenge

**San Francisco.** Calgene Inc., the biotechnology company based in Davis, California, has survived a patent challenge to its best known product, the genetically engineered 'Flavr Savr' tomato. But, after disappointing trial results, production of the Flavr Savr has been reduced, and the company has postponed commercialization while it evaluates new transgenic tomato varieties.

A judge in Delaware has ruled that the company has not infringed three patents owned by Enzo Biochem Inc. of New York on antisense, the technology used to extend the Calgene tomato's shelf-life. The judge ruled that Enzo's patents do not enable others to make use of the claimed invention, and were therefore invalid; in contrast, he said, Calgene's patent was valid.

Last week, however, the company said in a quarterly report released to investors that the Flavr Savr did not have acceptable yield or disease resistance traits, and that its quality also needed improvement. Calgene officials claims that such efforts will be

