

## Controversial AIDS vaccine fails to delay disease

**Washington.** The results of a five-year US study announced last week show that an experimental AIDS vaccine based on the genetically engineered HIV envelope protein gp160 does not affect the course of disease in HIV-infected volunteers.

The study, conducted under the auspices of the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research in Washington DC and the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, followed 608 volunteers for five years, until December 1995. Half were given the gp160 vaccine and half a placebo.

The study found that the vaccine, produced by Microgenesy Inc. of Meriden, Connecticut, led to an elevated immune response in those injected, but did not slow progression of the disease. "No clinical improvement" could be attributed to the vaccine, used as adjunct therapy for HIV infection, said a statement released by the Department of Defense.

The gp160 vaccine was at the heart of a controversy in 1992, when former Senator Russell Long (Democrat, Louisiana), a lobbyist for the company, helped it to land \$20 million in Defense Department funding for a large trial of the vaccine. □

## Ebola virus prompts monkey ban

**Washington.** The Philippines has banned the export of live monkeys after the death of two monkeys from an Ebola-like virus in a breeding facility in Texas. The monkeys had been imported from the Philippines last month. The ban will remain while a task force carries out tests on monkeys in Philippine breeding farms.

According to US and Philippine officials, the strain of the virus, known as Ebola Reston, poses no threat to public health. A third

monkey at the Texas centre has been infected with the virus, and, along with 47 others, will have to be destroyed, Texan health officials confirmed. The Philippines exports about 2,500 monkeys a year for medical research to the United States, Japan and Europe. □

## Germany shifts polar research ...

**Munich.** The German government last week announced a change in orientation of its polar research programme, which receives DM82 million (US\$59.2 million) a year. In line with decisions at the 1992 climate conference in Rio de Janeiro, Germany will concentrate its research on climate issues, including study of the ozone layer above the South and North Poles. For the first time, German scientists will work in Russian research stations in Arctic regions. The programme will also support studies on polar ecological systems. □

## ...and clears biotech programme

**Munich.** Bavaria last week approved a DM7-million (US\$4.8-million) biotechnology research programme to succeed its four-year DM5.3-million *Forbiosich* (Research into Biotechnology Safety) programme, which ends in December. The new programme will run for three years and will support a broader research base than its predecessor, which was restricted to retroviruses. Both programmes are supported by the Bavarian Research Foundation, established in 1993 with money from the state's extensive privatization programme. □

## Spending cuts 'undermine revival'

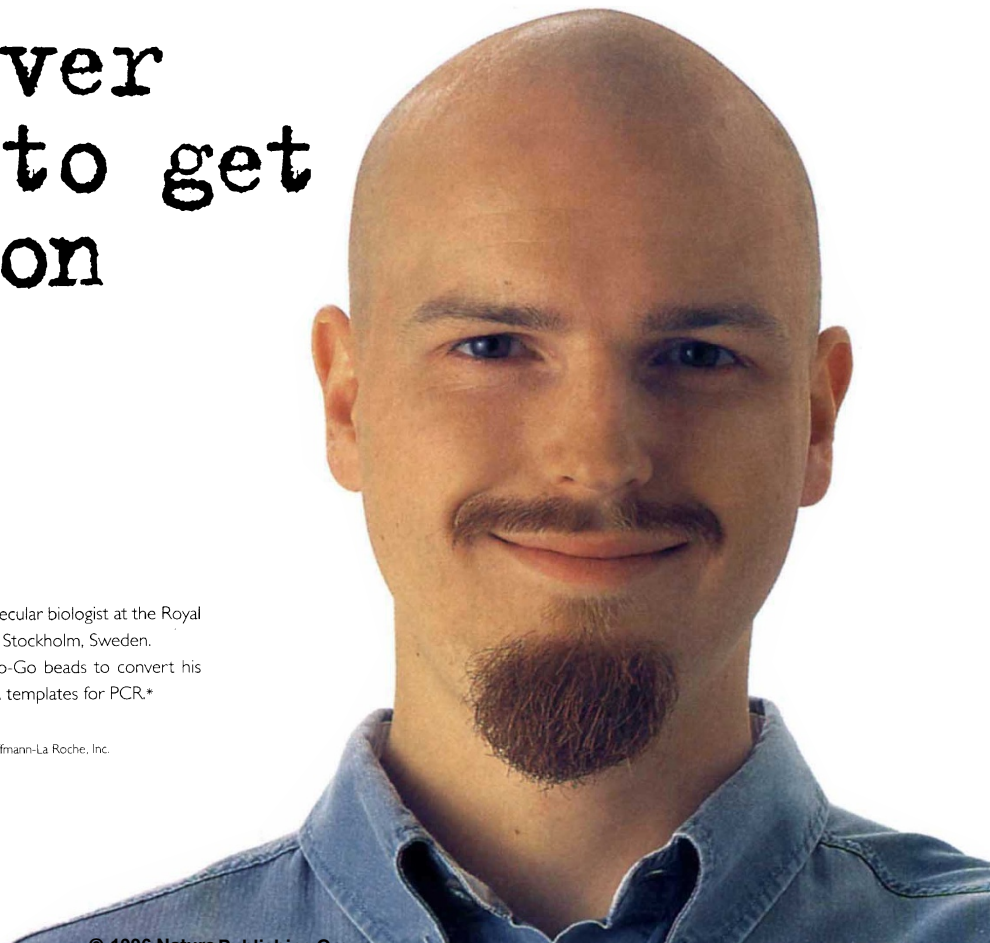
**Paris.** Massive cuts in spending on science and technology in the countries of the former Soviet Union risk undermining the market-oriented research and development base needed for economic and social revival, according to a paper published this week by the United Nations Educational Scientific and

# Patrik never fails to get a reaction

Patrik Samuelson is a molecular biologist at the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, Sweden.

Patrik uses Ready-To-Go beads to convert his RNA samples into cDNA templates for PCR.\*

\* PCR is a patented process of Hoffmann-La Roche, Inc.



Cultural Organization as part of its *World Science Report 1996*\*.

The paper, which was written by Leonid Gokhberg — deputy director of the Moscow-based Centre for Science Research — points out that most industrial research and development was military oriented, but that the huge cuts in defence spending are being made too quickly to allow its conversion to civilian ends. As a result, many large research institutes now face closure, he claims, while the links between research and industry that are needed for economic revival risk being irreversibly broken.

\**World Science Report 1996*, Unesco Publishing, Paris (h.moore@unesco.org), ISBN 92-3-103220-8. □

## Sandoz to buy organ company

**London.** The pharmaceutical company Sandoz Pharma Ltd announced last week that it is to purchase Imutran, a privately held biotechnology company that specializes in the development of animal organs for transplantation. Imutran last year announced that it had developed a technique for overcoming hyperacute rejection, the main barrier to xenotransplantation, which can occur within minutes or hours of transplantation (see *Nature* 377, 185; 1995). □

## Light sentences for DNA objectors

**Washington.** Two US marines court-martialled for refusing an order to provide blood and tissue samples for a Department of Defense gene bank have received nominal punishments, being confined to base for seven days and given a written reprimand.

The two — Lance Corporal John Mayfield and Corporal Joseph Vlacovsky — could have faced a dishonourable discharge and up to six months imprisonment (see *Nature* 380, 570; 1996). The Council for Responsible Genetics, a lobby group supporting the pair, said that in choosing the light sentences, “the military judge recognised [the] substantial and legitimate concerns” motivating the marines. □

## White House nominates officials

**Washington.** The White House has selected nominees to fill two key posts at its Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), according to administration officials. But it is unclear whether the Senate will ratify the choices before November’s presidential election.

Jerry Melillo, a prominent biogeochemist from the Marine Biological Laboratory at Woods Hole, Massachusetts, is the White House’s choice as associate director, environment, subject to security clearance. He would replace Bob Watson, who is moving to the World Bank next week.

Kerri-Ann Jones, an OSTP official who previously worked with the Agency for International Development, will be nominated as associate director, national security and international affairs. □

## Science camp exclusion claim

**Washington.** The US National Science Foundation (NSF) and Texas A&M University have settled a legal case brought last year by a white, 12-year-old girl excluded from an NSF-sponsored summer camp designed to foster interest in science among disadvantaged students (see *Nature* 374, 394; 1995). Under the settlement, the NSF has promised that its summer science camps will be open to students of all races, and has paid \$5,000 of the unnamed plaintiff’s costs. □

## How much vitamin C is best?

**Washington.** The optimal daily intake of vitamin C is about 200 mg, not the thousands of milligrams that the Nobel prizewinning chemist Linus Pauling believed would provide protection against serious illnesses, according to a study by the National Institutes of Health. The study, published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, concludes that daily doses above 400 mg have no evident value, and that 1,000 mg or more could be hazardous. □

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