

## Japanese minister takes pay cut to atone for HIV contamination

**Tokyo.** In an unusual attempt to atone for his ministry's failure to prevent the spread of HIV among Japanese haemophiliacs in the early to mid 1980s, Japan's Health and Welfare minister, Naoto Kan, last week announced pay cuts for himself and other top ministry officials. Kan and vice-minister, Hiroshi Tada, will take a 20 per cent cut in pay over the next two months. In addition, 13 other senior officials have received severe verbal reprimands for their handling of the disaster in which about 2,000 of Japan's haemophiliacs were infected with HIV from non heat-treated blood coagulants.

Kan, who only became minister in January this year, bears no responsibility for the disaster, and has spearheaded moves to force exposure of the ministry's culpable actions over the past 13 years. But it is in line with Japanese tradition that Kan, no matter how blameless, should take symbolic responsibility. Representatives of haemophiliacs, however, expressed dissatisfaction with the ministry's action, pointing out that a 20 per cent pay cut for two months is hardly adequate atonement for the infection of 2,000 people, of whom about 400 have died. □

## Merck signs diabetes pact

**New Jersey.** The pharmaceutical company, Merck & Co. Inc., has signed a collaborative research and licensing agreement with the Wellcome Trust and the University of Oxford for work on the discovery of human genes associated with the development of Type I — insulin-dependent — diabetes. The terms of the agreement have not been disclosed, but it represents Merck's first external collaboration in the area of genomics with the intention of identifying specific genes related to a disease.

The work will be carried out at the Wellcome Trust Centre for Human Genetics, which was established by the University of Oxford and the Wellcome Trust. The centre has pioneered the identification of genetic markers that show a relationship between Type I diabetes and a physical location on a chromosome. □

## German reactor gets go-ahead

**Munich.** Germany's next-generation fusion reactor, the Wendelstein-7X, designed by the Max Planck Institute for Plasma Physics in Garching, last week received the official go-ahead from the federal and *Länder* governments, which are to share its DM500-million (US\$333-million) investment costs with the European Union. The final signing of agreements after months of uncertainty (see *Nature* 378; 652; 1995) means that Wendelstein-7X, to be sited at Greifswald in East Germany, should begin to operate by 2005. □

## Habitat II urged to heed science

**Istanbul.** Scientists representing 72 of the world's academies of science have urged world leaders to give science and technology a higher priority in solving urban problems and in reconciling economic advancement with environmentally sustainable development.

In a statement issued to coincide with the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, Habitat II, the representatives expressed concern that science and technology issues were being ignored in a conference document that is likely to guide future policy on urban development and the problems faced by 'megacities'.

Science and technology have a crucial role in ensuring the long term sustainability of cities, said F. Sherwood Rowland, foreign secretary to the US Academy of Sciences, a Nobel laureate and co-chair of the inter-academy panel that co-sponsored the Istanbul meeting. "But it can't be done unless you have the education and training in place to ensure that scientific capacity continues to grow. And that concept, as well as others regarding science and technology, is missing from the document." □

## Psychologist must 'modify style'

**London.** Chris Brand, a psychology lecturer at the University of Edinburgh and the author of a controversial text on race and intelligence, has been asked by the university to "modify his style of teaching" following complaints from students (see *Nature* 381, 105; 1996). An inquiry into Brand's teaching conduct concluded that his lectures needed to be more balanced and his relationship with students one of "mutual respect".

A statement from the university said that the psychology department "will be asked to consider redistributing the teaching load in certain areas [such as intelligence and personality] which to date have been highly concentrated upon Mr Brand". The inquiry noted, however, that Brand was fair and impartial when he was assessing students' work. □

## Woman heads Indian biotech unit

**New Delhi.** Manju Sharma, 53, has become India's first woman scientist to be given the rank of secretary in the Ministry of Science and Technology. She has been appointed secretary to the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), a key department in the science ministry, succeeding Chittaranjan Bhatia, who retired five months ago. Until her selection last week, Sharma was an adviser in the DBT. A botanist by training, she is also president of the National Academy of Sciences in Allahabad. Sharma said that DBT will give priority to applications of biotechnology to agriculture and to developing DNA technologies for prenatal diagnosis of genetic disorders. □

## China and Germany plan links

**Bonn.** China and Germany last week signed an agreement that provides for the extension of cooperation in scientific research and education. The Chinese minister for State Education, Zhu Kaixuan, and his German counterpart, Jürgen Rüttgers, agreed that moves to enhance links between the two countries should be completed within three years, after which further links to the European scientific research community will be considered. The Chinese Educational and Scientific Research Network and the German Research Network Association have been charged with working out the details of the agreement. □

## Radar array will enlighten aurora



**London.** Greater understanding of the Northern Lights, or Aurora Borealis, which are caused by storms on the surface of the Sun, will soon be possible thanks to the completion of a new radar interferometer consisting of antennae in Finland and Iceland. The Collaborative UK Twin Location Auroral Sounding System — or CUTLASS — has 16 antennae in its main array, capable of viewing 3 million square-kilometres, an area equivalent to the size of western Europe. It was designed and constructed at Leicester University, with financial support from the UK Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council, as well as from the governments of Finland and Sweden. □