

Holocaust homework question prompts protests in France

Paris. A French schoolteacher was suspended last week for giving her pupils as homework the task of calculating the concentration of carbon monoxide (CO) needed to gas Jews during the Second World War.

The outline of the homework question was that "Hitler killed Jews by locking them in lorries where the exhaust pipe had been connected to the interior". It went on to give the volume of the lorry, the fatal concentration of CO reached, and then asked pupils to calculate the amount of CO needed to be produced by the engine, given that "people took 20 minutes on average to die".

The incident has caused widespread protests in France. The teacher, who works at a high school near Paris, has defended the exercise as an attempt to remind the children of the Holocaust. But critics argue that her action was naive and insensitive, and could only contribute to a banalization of this tragic period of history. □

Nuclear test ban edges closer

London. Prospects for a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty — currently being negotiated at the disarmament conference in Geneva — edged closer last week, when China unexpectedly announced that it was prepared to accept a temporary ban on 'peaceful' nuclear explosions, carried out for research rather than military purposes.

But Sha Zukang, China's ambassador to the disarmament conference, said the matter would need to be assessed at the disarmament review conference in 10 years' time before China signed any ban on all nuclear explosions, including those for military purposes. The ambassador added that China would not automati-

cally accept on-site inspections — Beijing wants inspections to be approved by two-thirds of the executive council — and would be conducting one more nuclear test before its ban came into force. □

Computer partners agree terms

San Diego. The two partners operating the San Diego Supercomputer Center in California have patched up a dispute about a new grant from the US National Science Foundation (NSF) (see *Nature* **381**, 104; 1996), and have agreed to submit a joint proposal for NSF funds.

Officials announced on 3 June that the University of California, San Diego, will lead the new proposal, while General Atomics, a private company that is the current manager, will become the major subcontractor. Sidney Karin, who has been the director of the centre since the 1985 partnership began, will direct the combined San Diego proposal for the NSF grants. The winners will be announced in the autumn. □

Hunting less fatal than pollution?

London. Whales are at greater risk from ozone depletion and atmospheric pollution than from commercial whaling, according to Peter Bridgewater, president of the International Whaling Commission (IWC). His comments came as the Environmental Investigation Agency, a conservation group, calculated that more than 1,500 striped dolphins have died in the Mediterranean in recent months from a virus linked to elevated concentrations of a pollutant. In addition, the group estimated that 750 bottle-nosed dolphins died in the Gulf of Mexico from a viral infection, toxic algae and pollution.

The debate about commercial whaling is likely to resume when whaling nations meet in Aberdeen, Scotland, for the forty-eighth annual IWC meeting from 24 to 28 June. Norway, Japan and Iceland

To **save an hour**
each time you
purify histidine-
tagged proteins,
put it on the
tip of a syringe

