

## Research results prompt review of BSE slaughter policy

**London.** The British government has announced that it is carrying out an immediate review of its cattle-slaughtering plans, following the publication of research results last week that suggest that a selective cull will not eradicate bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) from the British herd.

Using previously confidential statistics on BSE supplied by the Ministry of Agriculture, Roy Anderson, professor of zoology at the University of Oxford, and colleagues concluded that the epidemic is now in decline, and may disappear by 2001 without the need for additional culling (see *Nature* 382, 777; 1996).

But the researchers concluded that only a prohibitively large slaughter programme would accelerate the elimination of BSE. The Ministry of Agriculture has now announced that its cattle-slaughter programme, which was expected to begin around the end of next month, is to be re-evaluated in the light of the research. □

## Cuts 'undermine' space centre

**Washington.** The head of the Kennedy Space Centre in Florida has warned officials of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) that staffing reductions being demanded by Washington could seriously undermine the centre's ability to meet its responsibilities. In particular, wrote Jay Honeycutt in a letter published last week on an Internet site dealing with planned lay-offs at the agency, plans to cut the workforce from its current level of 2,100 to 1,445 in October 1998 would lead to a halt in upgrade work being carried out on the space shuttle after that date. Such plans, he added, could also force the centre to discontinue independent safety studies on shuttle flights, as demanded by the federal commission that investigated the Challenger explosion in 1986. □

## European plasma probes launch

**Paris.** The Interball-2 satellite was launched last week from Plesetsk in northern Russia, along with an accompanying small Czech satellite, Magion-5. They will join Interball-1 and Magion-4, which were launched in August 1995. The Interball project involves 20 countries, including the European Space Agency.

The project is designed to study plasma processes in the atmosphere. It consists of two pairs of satellites, the Tail Probe pair and the Auroral Probe Pair. The former will study solar wind disturbances and X-ray emission bursts on the Sun, while the latter, launched last week, will simultaneously study the impact of these on the magnetosphere and ionosphere. □

## Award for scientific journalism

**London.** Herbert Cerutti of the Swiss daily newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* has been awarded the 1996 Georg von Holtzbrinck Prize for Scientific Journalism. Cerutti is recognized for "competent and objective scientific reporting of the highest quality". The award was set up by the Georg von Holtzbrinck group, the owner of *Nature*, last year, on the 150th anniversary of *Scientific American*. The DM10,000 (US\$6,750) prize will be awarded in Berlin on 15 November. □

## Marine animal centre agreed

**Boston.** An agreement was reached last month by the International Wildlife Coalition in Falmouth, Massachusetts, to build a National Marine Life Center in Bourne, on Cape Cod, as the world's first facility dedicated to rehabilitating and releasing stranded whales, seals, sea lions, dolphins and turtles.

Joseph Geraci, the president of the centre, says that studying stranded marine animals will not only help them to recover but will

also provide opportunities to learn about the health of animals at sea and of the oceans themselves. Daniel Morast, president of the coalition, says that the centre will help to establish scientifically proven methods for evaluating the condition of the animals washed up on beaches. "Right now our response to stranded animals is well-meaning, but somewhat unscientific," he says. □

## Blood scandal scientist arrested

**Tokyo.** Takeshi Abe, one of the scientists at the centre of the scandal in Japan about the distribution of HIV-contaminated blood products in the mid-1980s, was arrested last week on suspicion of professional negligence resulting in the death of a haemophilia patient.

Abe (pictured right) is the first person to be arrested in the contaminated blood products scandal. In 1983, he was in charge of a Ministry of Health and Welfare AIDS study group that recommended the continued use by haemophiliacs of blood products that had not been heat treated. As a result, nearly half of Japan's 5,000 haemophiliacs were infected with HIV.

Shortly after Abe's arrest, the prosecutor's office raided the Ministry of Health and Welfare. It also raided Nippon Zoki Pharmaceutical Co. Ltd, which distributed Kryobulin, a non-heat-treated blood product which Abe is suspected of administering at Teikyo University Hospital in May and June 1985, when, it is claimed, he should have been aware of the risk of HIV infection. □

## Thatcher 'used astrologer'

**London.** A British newspaper astrologer is claiming to have been approached a decade ago by the former prime minister Margaret Thatcher to keep a watch on her astrological chart and warn of any impending "danger".

Marjorie Orr is reported to have said that she was contacted by Thatcher's press secretary after an IRA bomb killed the wife of one cabinet minister and narrowly missed Thatcher, during a Conservative Party conference in Brighton in 1986. But her former press secretary, Sir Bernard Ingham, has said he could not recall asking Orr to keep a watch on the stars of his boss, a chemistry graduate. He described astrology as "a load of rubbish". □

## Human impact assessment

**Washington.** A three-year multidisciplinary research project to assess the impact of increasing human numbers on plant and animal life will start later this year, sponsored by the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Research at several locations around the world will focus on how factors such as migration, tourism and consumption affect biodiversity. Funded by a \$200,000 grant from the MacArthur Foundation, the project follows a meeting to identify research priorities on biodiversity and population. □

## Science festival will be eclipsed

**Paris.** The organizers of France's annual science festival will this year be praying more earnestly than usual for clear skies. The three-day event will coincide with a partial eclipse of the Sun on 12 October that will be visible for more than two hours across the entire country. "La Science en fête" attracted four million people last year. This year, almost 2,000 events are being staged across France, many at the initiative of local research centres, with about 10,000 scientists taking part. French scientists enjoy a level of respect in society that their colleagues on the other side of the Channel can only dream of. A theatrical representation of the Channel Tunnel itself, "The Victorian connection", will be given in Paris by the Spectrum theatre company from London's Science Museum. □