

Hughes widens funding for research projects to South America

[WASHINGTON] The Howard Hughes Medical Institute, the largest source of private funds for biomedical research in the United States, announced last week that it is expanding its reach to include projects in four further countries in South America.

The institute has awarded \$15 million in grants to 47 scientists in Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Mexico and Venezuela. Research being funded includes studies of the genetic origins of cancer, the molecular basis of parasitic diseases and mechanisms of cell growth control.

The awards mark an expansion of the institute's international research programme, which began in 1991 when \$11 million was awarded to scientists in Canada and Mexico. In 1995, it supported researchers in Belarus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, the Slovak Republic and Ukraine.

Galileo given longer look at Jupiter's moons

[WASHINGTON] Galileo spacecraft managers at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) in Pasadena, California, have been given

permission to extend their exploration of Jupiter by another two years. Originally the mission was to end in November. But last summer JPL proposed a low-cost extension to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (see *Nature*, 382, 745; 1996). For an additional \$30 million, Galileo will fly past Jupiter's moon Europa eight more times, and Calisto four more times, ending with a close fly-by of the volcanic moon Io. The money will come from savings resulting from improved efficiency in spacecraft operations, according to Galileo managers.

Danish drug company buys Indian products

[LONDON] In what is said to be the first decision by an Indian company to license its discoveries to an international pharmaceutical company in return for advance payments and royalties, the Danish pharmaceutical company Novo Nordisk has bought the rights to develop and market pharmaceutical products manufactured by Dr Reddy's Research Foundation, a group of companies based in India.

Novo Nordisk is known for its diabetes products. Bruce Carter, an executive vice-president of the company, said the agreement with the foundation, which has an annual turnover of US\$100 million, will enable his company to gain access to

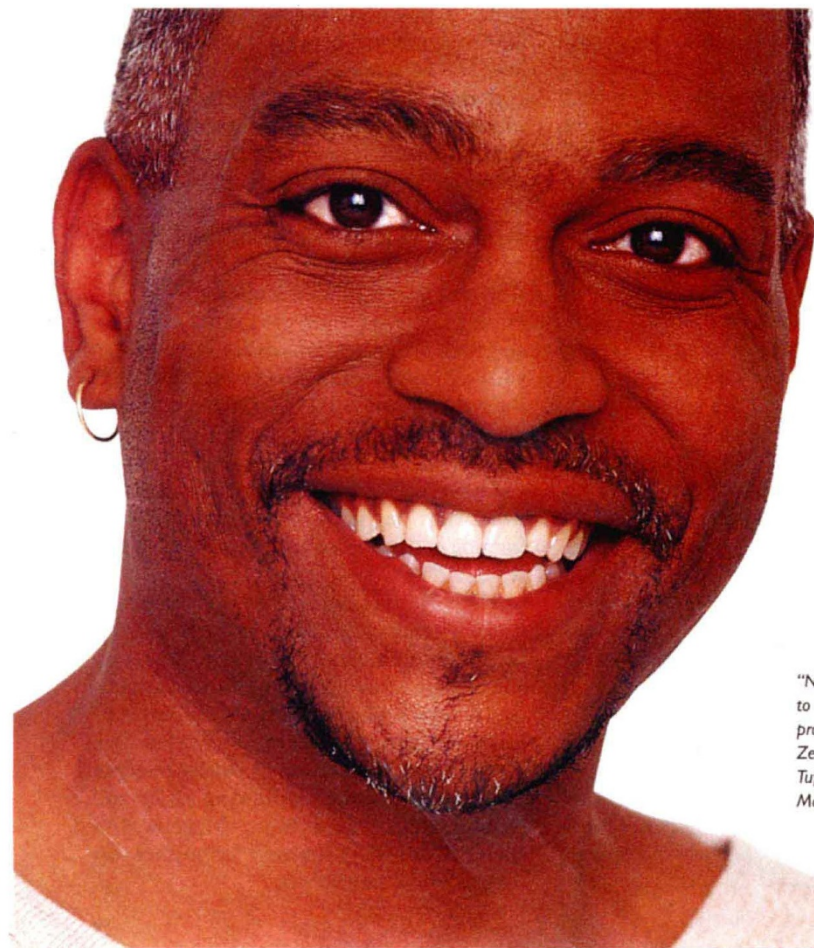
compounds that may "prove useful in the treatment of diabetes and its complications". The agreement covers compounds thought to have potential for treating diabetes, obesity, dyslipidemia and related complications.

German industry spends more on research

[MUNICH] After several lean years, German industry has started to increase its spending on research and development (R&D). Statistics published last week show an estimated rise in spending of 2 per cent in 1995 and 1.8 per cent in 1996. The trend seems likely to continue; a quarter of manufacturers predict higher spending on R&D this year compared to 1996. But the number of staff employed in industrial R&D continues its downward path. Since 1991 the number of research workers has fallen by 15 per cent to 274,000.

FDA plans guidance on human cell procedures

[WASHINGTON] The US Food and Drug Administration issued a plan last week for regulating human cells and tissues used in procedures ranging from tissue transplants to gene therapy that is intended to replace the current patchwork system of regulation.



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"Not being a protein chemist, I just want to clone the gene, express it, isolate the protein and move on," says Malcolm Zellars, who's working on his post-doc at Tufts University Medical School in Boston, Massachusetts, USA.

The proposed framework adopts a graded approach to regulation depending on the degree of risk of contamination or damage posed by cells or tissues. Gene therapies, for example, would fall under the strictest category of scrutiny, requiring pre-market approval and controlled clinical trials just as new drugs and medical devices do now. At the other end of the scale, tissues removed and transplanted to the same patient in a single procedure would not be regulated.

Basic research is priority for German universities

[MUNICH] Klaus Landfried, who was last week elected president of the German University Rectors Conference, says that defending basic research in German universities will be one of his main priorities when his three-year period of office begins in August. With federal and regional governments preferring to concentrate their shrinking research funds in a few areas of applied research, Landfried warns that small university groups, whose research does not fit into the chosen categories, could be the biggest losers. Landfried, a professor of political science at the University of Kaiserslautern, near Mannheim, promises to fight for more money from the federal government to repair university buildings, particularly in the neglected east of Germany. Many research

buildings are in such a dire state that scientists cannot comply with safety regulations.

Oscar nominations for US science films

[WASHINGTON] Special Effects and Cosmic Voyage, two educational films made with the support of the US National Science Foundation, have been nominated for this year's Oscar in the documentary, short subject category by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences. The films, which were made in the large-screen, IMAX format, deal respectively with the use of science and mathematics in movie-making, and with the size and scale of the Universe.

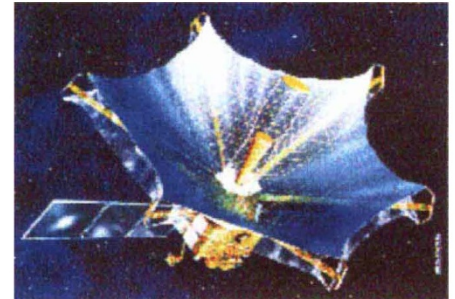
French law ruling queries Superphénix decision

[PARIS] Environmental groups last week won a legal challenge over the French government's decision in 1994 to restart Superphénix — the world's largest prototype fast-breeder reactor — not to produce power station but to study the incineration of plutonium (see *Nature* 370, 401; 1994).

The Council of State, the supreme court, ruled that the public inquiry that preceded the 1994 decision was based on the use of the reactor — at Crey-Malville near Lyon — for generating electricity and could not be

considered as a proper evaluation of the reactor for research purposes. The most likely outcome is that the government will be obliged to hold a new public inquiry.

Astronomical antenna unfolds in space



[TOKYO] The world's first programme in space-based radioastronomy passed a critical step last week with the successful opening of the 8-metre parabolic antenna (above) on the Japanese radiotelescope satellite HALCA (Highly Advanced Laboratory for Communications and Astronomy). The satellite was launched last month to carry out observations in Very Long Baseline Interferometry (VLBI) in conjunction with ground-based telescopes (see *Nature* 385, 663; 1997). Known also as VSOP, standing for VLBI Space Observatory Programme, the satellite will begin test observations in April.

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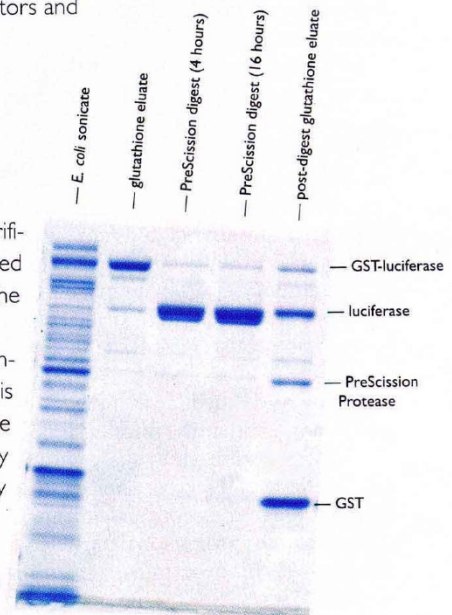
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