

Argentina backs US on developing country greenhouse targets

[LONDON] Argentina has endorsed a US proposal that the faster-growing developing countries should join industrialized countries and make legally binding commitments to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The endorsement comes on the eve of negotiations in Bonn, Germany, this week to discuss the text of a greenhouse gas protocol that will be finalized at the annual conference of the United Nations climate convention in Kyoto, Japan, in December.

Argentina is the first of the Group of 77 developing countries to openly break ranks; most continue to oppose the US proposals, and deadlock threatens to derail the Kyoto talks because the protocol needs a consensus of all the climate convention's signatory countries.

Some European Union member states are warming to a compromise solution in which developing countries should begin to discuss emissions reductions during the Kyoto talks, perhaps even pencilling in a future date for legally binding targets.

Meanwhile, the issue of developing country commitments will be discussed at the Commonwealth heads of government meeting in Edinburgh, UK, which starts tomorrow (24 October), and during a week-long visit to the United States by China's president Jiang Zemin. China is known to favour an emissions reduction protocol formulated on a per capita basis.

Top German universities win most funding

[MUNICH] Ninety per cent of grant money given by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, which funds university research in Germany, was awarded to just 50 per cent of universities in the first half of the 1990s. Information about the relative performances of German universities in winning grants was published for the first time last week, as a way of promoting competition between them.

Clinton shoots down asteroid mission

[WASHINGTON] US President Bill Clinton last week used his new 'line-item' veto powers to delete funding for 13 military projects, including the controversial Clementine 2 spacecraft mission that was to have flown past two or more asteroids from 2000. The project now appears dead, two years after it was first included in the Pentagon budget.

Clementine 2 was to have tested miniature spacecraft components left over from the 'Star Wars' Strategic Defense Initiative. It would have sent microsatellites crashing into

the asteroids' surface to study the crater and ejected material in an attempt to learn more about asteroid composition.

There was enthusiasm for the mission in some parts of the US Air Force and cautious interest from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration in cooperating (see *Nature* 387, 110; 1997). But the idea of shooting objects into an asteroid raised concern about possible military applications, such as knocking down satellites, that could have had implications for international treaties governing space-based weapons.

Japanese scientists want grant process reformed

[TOKYO] A high proportion of Japanese scientists disapprove of the way funding proposals are handled by the Ministry for Education, according to a study by the Japanese Society for Biochemistry. Of 225 researchers who replied to a questionnaire sent to about 300 of the society's members, 191 agreed that the selection of grant proposals under the ministry's general university grants scheme (known as *kaken-hi*) is plagued by 'conflicts of interest'. Only seven considered the review process as 'fair'.

Scientists in the survey seem to be equally upset about the way recently established large-scale grants are awarded. And most wanted applications for the 'Research for the Future' programme of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science to be put on an open basis (see *Nature* 383, 369; 1996).

Nobel winner to set up Canadian gene centre

[MONTREAL] Canada's Nobel prizewinning chemist Michael Smith is trying to lure back Canadian scientists working on gene sequencing abroad by setting up a centre in British Columbia. It will be the first of its kind in Canada, researching the genes of people with breast, prostate, colon and lung cancer. The centre's scientists will try to correlate genetic information with the clinical progression of the disease.

"Canada would have been left behind if we were not getting into this field," says Smith, who shared the Nobel prize for chemistry in 1993. The new centre, to be funded primarily by the British Columbia Cancer Foundation, and other private and government agencies, will not duplicate work in centres elsewhere in the world. It opens next year in Vancouver.

Commercial whaling in return for sanctuaries?

[LONDON] The International Whaling Commission is considering a proposal from the government of Ireland for a limited reintroduction of commercial whaling in

coastal waters. The scheme was proposed at the commission's 49th annual meeting this week in Monaco. It would replace the current moratorium on commercial whaling, which is not recognized by Japan and Norway.

In return for ending the moratorium, Ireland suggests the setting-up of a global whale sanctuary outside coastal belts. But the proposal is opposed by environmentalist groups, who want the moratorium to be replaced by a permanent ban on whaling.

Population research in South Africa

[LONDON] A centre for population research is to be set up in Durban, South Africa, with the help of a £5-million (US\$8-million) grant from the UK Wellcome Trust. The African Centre for Research in Population Studies and Reproductive Health will be managed by a consortium of the universities of Natal and Durban-Westville, and the South African Medical Research Council.

The centre will concentrate on a study of the 75,000-strong population of the Hlabisa district in South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal province. Projects include a study of urinary tract infections and syphilis in pregnancy, and migration and spread of HIV.

Elsevier takes over current science titles

[LONDON] Elsevier Science, publishers of the *Trends* group of journals, have taken over several companies in the Current Science Group (CSG), including the electronic information services BioMedNet and ChemWeb. Elsevier will also acquire *Current Biology* and *Current Chemistry*, as well as the *Current Opinion* journal series.

But other titles, such as *Science Archive*, *Science Press*, *Current Medicine* and *Current Drugs*, will remain within the CSG fold. Elsevier has already been involved with both BioMedNet and ChemWeb, which were launched by CSG as a joint venture with MDL Information Systems Inc., a US-based subsidiary of Elsevier Science. The new move took place shortly after the announcement that Reed Elsevier, the parent company of Elsevier Science and the world's largest scientific and professional publishers, is to merge with the Dutch publishing company Wolters Kluwer.

Erratum: Axel Kahn

Contrary to the headline on a news item in last week's *Nature* (see *Nature* 389, 656; 1997), the medical geneticist Axel Kahn is not leaving the Cochin Institute of Molecular Genetics in Paris when he takes up his new position as deputy scientific director for health and agricultural biotechnology at Rhône-Poulenc. Although he will devote half his time to his new post, he will maintain his research activities at the institute. Kahn is also head of an INSERM unit at the institute, and not, as the article said, director of the institute itself. We apologize for the errors.