

Environmentalists' bugbear to head research institute

Copenhagen Bjorn Lomborg, the author of the controversial book *The Skeptical Environmentalist*, has been appointed director of a new institute for environmental research in his native Denmark. His appointment as head of the Institute of Environmental Evaluation was announced on 26 February by the new Liberal-Conservative coalition government.

In his 2001 book, Lomborg uses statistics to challenge widely held beliefs about the state of the global environment. Many environmental scientists strongly disagreed with his conclusions (see *Nature* 414, 149-150; 2001).

Lomborg has no formal qualifications in environmental science, and scientists and environmental groups in Denmark have criticized the appointment, saying that it reflects the new government's unhelpful approach to environmental issues. As a further example, they cite the decision to lift a nation-wide ban on disposable packaging, which, they say, encouraged recycling.

Bomb tests killed 11,000 in United States, study claims

Washington Almost every person in the United States has been exposed to radiation from nuclear testing, according to a preliminary report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The study estimates the radiation exposure and potential health effects of tests conducted in the United States and elsewhere between 1951 and 1962. Between 10,000 and 200,000 incidents of thyroid cancer and some 11,000 deaths can be linked to the testing, the authors say. "Any person living in the contiguous United States since 1951 has been exposed to radioactive fallout, and all organs and tissues of the body have received some radiation exposure," the study concludes. But some scientists have criticized the methods used to predict the numbers of

deaths resulting from fallout.

The CDC findings are scheduled to be peer reviewed by the National Academy of Sciences, but were made public by Tom Harkin, Democrat senator for Iowa, and posted on a website run by the Institute for Energy and Environmental Research, an environmental pressure group based in Maryland. The academy says it will review the findings and release its own report in six to nine months' time.

♦ www.ieer.org

FDA gains a deputy as no one agrees on head

Washington President George W. Bush seems to have found a way around the deadlock that has left the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) leaderless for more than a year.

Lester Crawford, a veterinary surgeon and food-safety specialist from the Center for Food and Nutrition Policy in northern Virginia, was made deputy commissioner of the FDA on 25 February. This post does not require congressional approval, unlike the FDA commissioner's job, which remains vacant because of political differences.

The Bush administration has come under fire for failing to fill several top scientific positions at important agencies (see *Nature* 415, 946; 2002). Crawford is reported to have previously been approached by the Bush administration for the post of commissioner, and could now run the agency indefinitely.

TB gene sequence could save cows and badgers

Paris Humans, cows and badgers could all benefit from the latest genome to be fully sequenced: *Mycobacterium bovis*, the bacterium that causes tuberculosis (TB) in a wide range of wild and domestic animals.

The sequence is almost identical to that of *M. tuberculosis*, the bacterium that causes TB in humans (see *Nature* 393, 537; 1998). The result means that groups working on vaccines for the different strains could collaborate in the future.



Badger benefits: a TB vaccine could prevent the slaughter of thousands of the animals.

A vaccine for the animal form of TB is badly needed, as the disease costs farmers around the world US\$3 billion a year, say the researchers who carried out the sequencing.

It could also save the lives of thousands of British badgers. The animals are suspected of spreading the disease among cattle, and tens of thousands will be killed over the next few years as part of an experiment into controlling the disease.

The sequence was produced by researchers at the UK government's Veterinary Laboratories Agency, the Sanger Centre near Cambridge, and the Pasteur Institute in France.

♦ www.sanger.ac.uk

US import controls 'can't keep BSE out'

Washington Current controls in the United States are not sufficient to prevent animal products infected with bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) from entering the country, a report by the US General Accounting Office (GAO) has concluded.

BSE was spread among British cattle when parts of infected animals were used in feed for other animals. The US Department of Agriculture began to block imports of animal products from infected countries in 1989, but the report, issued on 26 February, says that there is insufficient manpower to police this ban. Infected feed may also have entered the country before the ban, and the authors question the methods used by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to combat this risk. The GAO says that the FDA is not inspecting farms to make sure that they are complying with regulations over use of animal feed.

New cases of BSE are still being reported in Britain, despite a cull of potentially infected animals and a ban on the type of feed that helped to spread the disease. John Wilesmith, an epidemiologist with the government's Veterinary Laboratories Agency, has speculated that imports of meat from infected countries could be the cause of recent new BSE infections. This may explain why Britain has failed to eradicate BSE, Wilesmith said last week.

♦ www.gao.gov/new.items/d02183.pdf

Red planet turns blue

Paris NASA's Mars Odyssey spacecraft beamed back its first pictures last week, revealing new panoramas of the red planet and prompting further claims that it contains significant amounts of water.

This image shows the intensity of mid-energy neutrons emitted by the planet. The particles are created by collisions between incoming cosmic rays and the planet's surface. Hydrogen near the surface slows down these neutrons, and the blue areas on the image indicate the presence of this element. NASA says the hydrogen is likely to be locked up in ice.

♦ mars.jpl.nasa.gov/odyssey

