

UK primate centre gets the nod but faces cash shortfall

London A planned primate-research facility at the University of Cambridge, UK, which has been the subject of a long-running row between the university and animal-rights groups, has been given the go-ahead by the British government.

A proposal to build the Centre for Behavioural Neuroscience, which would use primates for research into Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases, was rejected by South Cambridgeshire council last year after police warned that the research could attract violent protests. The deputy prime minister, John Prescott, overruled that decision on 21 November, stating that the centre's planned research is in the national interest.

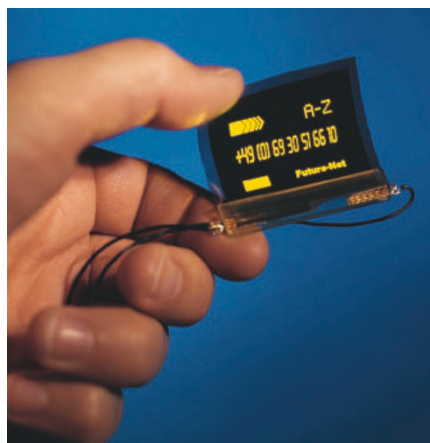
But the centre's future is far from certain. The delay, combined with the need for additional security at the site, has pushed up costs by some £8 million (US\$14 million) to £32 million. The original £24 million pledged by the government and the Wellcome Trust, an independent research-funding charity, remains secure, and the university says it is in discussion with potential funders regarding the shortfall.

Bendy screens and wobbly world win European award

Paris This year's Descartes Prize — a €1-million (US\$1.2-million) purse that rewards successful European collaborations, has been awarded to two teams of researchers.

Richard Friend, a physicist at the University of Cambridge, UK, together with researchers and companies from Belgium, Sweden, the Netherlands and Germany, won €700,000 for discovering that light can be emitted by semiconducting polymers (see *Nature* 397, 121–128; 1999), and for their work to turn these plastics into flat displays for use in roll-up computer and television screens. They were first used last year, in the battery-level display on the Philips Spectra electric shaver.

The other €300,000 went to a consortium



On a roll: the flexible screen that won its inventors a share of the Descartes Prize.

led by Veronique Dehant of the Royal Observatory of Belgium, with researchers from Austria, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Poland, Russia, Spain and the Ukraine. They developed a model to predict a wobble in Earth's axis, caused by the pull of the Sun and Moon, helping to improve the resolution of global satellite-navigation systems tenfold.

► www.cordis.lu/descartes

Particle-physics funder backs linear collider

London Britain's particle-physics funding body has thrown its weight behind plans for an international linear collider, a multibillion-pound project to study particles produced by high-energy collisions between electrons and positrons.

The endorsement comes in the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council's five-year plan, which is due to be released on 25 November. The council will spend £11 million (US\$19 million) on accelerator research and development between now and 2006 to ensure that British scientists are involved in the collider, although it does not expect Britain to host the facility. It also intends to invest in plans for an international neutrino research facility, a project that it says could be hosted at the

Rutherford Appleton Laboratory near Didcot in Oxfordshire.

The collider project has been gaining momentum in recent weeks, although governments are not expected to make a final decision on funding until 2007. On 10 November it was ranked as a mid-term priority by the US Department of Energy (see *Nature* 426, 108; 2003). The following week, a panel to oversee designs for the collider was established at a meeting of the International Linear Collider Steering Committee in Paris.

Congress endorses big spending on small science

Washington The US Congress has passed a bill recommending that almost \$4 billion should be spent on nanotechnology over the next four years, with a National Nanotechnology Coordination Office overseeing research.

The bill also calls for a federal advisory panel to look into the societal and ethical issues surrounding nanotechnology, which has attracted some concern over its possible effects on health and the environment (see *Nature* 424, 246–248; 2003).

The bill, which was unanimously passed by both houses, continues support for the government's National Nanotechnology Initiative, created in 2000. The initiative was originally set to run for five years, but the bill will extend investment until 2007.

"We think these are positive steps," says Mark Modzelewski of the NanoBusiness Alliance, a group based in New York City that represents more than 250 US research firms interested in nanotechnology.

Irish scientists smiling at research cash boost

London Ireland's basic research has been boosted by a 62% increase in next year's budget for Science Foundation Ireland, the country's main science agency. The government has also lifted a freeze on funding for the Higher Education Authority, which supports university science.

The changes are good news for a country that has experienced both drought and plenty in its science funding. After stagnating for years, Ireland's spending on basic research increased by an order of magnitude in 2000 (see *Nature* 404, 215; 2000). But this was set back by a freeze on Higher Education Authority funding which was announced in November 2000.

Science Foundation Ireland's budget will increase by €44 million (US\$52 million) to €113.7 million for 2004. The increase was welcomed by the foundation's director, William Harris, who says it is crucial to sustaining Ireland's position as a "globally competitive, knowledge-driven economy".

Polar eclipse may cast light on solar size

London Shadow-chasers, who travel the world in pursuit of eclipses, had a long way to go last week: the total solar eclipse (right) that occurred on 23 November was visible only from the Antarctic.

Several scientists made the trek south to watch the event, including astronomer John Parkinson from Sheffield Hallam University, UK. He monitored the duration of the eclipse as part of an ongoing



effort to find out whether the Sun is measurably shrinking.

"It was absolutely brilliant," he told *Nature*, from an icebreaker parked in the path of totality. "The corona seemed particularly active," he said, adding that this may

have been linked with some particularly large solar flares seen a month earlier. "The Sun spins once every 26 days, so we saw it about one full spin after these big blobs were ejected."