

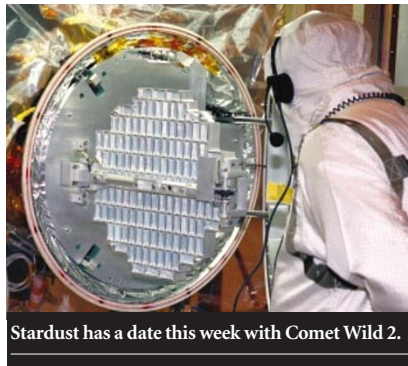
UK medical-research chief angered by snub in Queen's honours list

London The head of Britain's Medical Research Council, Colin Blakemore, has threatened to resign after a newspaper report claimed that he was denied a knighthood because of his vocal defence of research on animals.

According to papers leaked last month to *The Sunday Times*, Blakemore was refused the honour because civil servants considered his public statements on animal experimentation to be too controversial. Blakemore has received letter-bombs from animal-rights activists in the past.

In the wake of the report, Blakemore threatened to resign unless the government reaffirmed its support for animal studies and acknowledged the need to defend the researchers involved. Science minister David Sainsbury announced on 22 December that the government "admires and fully supports those on the front line who have stood up to animal-rights extremists".

Sainsbury also stressed that the decision was made by civil servants and does not reflect government policy. Blakemore said that he was considering his response to Sainsbury's comments.



Stardust has a date this week with Comet Wild 2.

NASA probe closes in on comet to catch stardust

Washington Almost five years after it was launched, NASA's Stardust spacecraft is finally closing in on its quarry. On 2 January the probe is scheduled to fly through the dust surrounding Comet Wild 2, aiming to snag dust particles to bring to Earth in 2006. The project is the first attempt to capture cometary material for study on the ground.

Stardust's collecting device will use a foam-like gel to attempt to trap the interstellar dust grains without shattering them as the probe zips through the cloud at six kilometres per second. Cameras on the spacecraft should also return pictures

showing Wild 2's nucleus in unprecedented detail. The European Space Agency's Giotto mission photographed Halley's comet at close range in 1986, but Stardust's planned fly-by will be much closer, and the comet's dust cloud is not expected to be as thick.

Chinese test results spark fresh SARS fear

Tokyo SARS may have returned to China's Guangdong province. As *Nature* went to press, World Health Organization officials were scrambling to investigate test results from three labs in China, which suggested that a 32-year-old television producer from the region had been infected by the virus that causes severe acute respiratory syndrome.

Confusion surrounded the diagnosis, however, as not all of the tests conducted on samples from the patient yielded positive results. His temperature also returned to normal faster than would be expected.

The suspected Chinese case follows an incident in neighbouring Taiwan, in which a researcher at the Institute of Preventive Medicine of Taiwan National University, near Taipei, infected himself after handling samples without wearing protective gloves. This was the second instance of laboratory contamination, following a case in Singapore in September.

The cases raise questions about lab safety — but public-health experts are much more alarmed about the suggestion that SARS has returned to Guangdong, which was the epicentre of last year's outbreak.

Panel ordered to revisit verdict on Lomborg book

London An investigation into the scientific honesty of Bjørn Lomborg, the author of a popular book that attacks many widely held environmental beliefs, has been re-opened by the Danish government.

The Danish Committees on Scientific Dishonesty, which studied Lomborg's book, *The Skeptical Environmentalist*, said in January 2003 that the work was, "objectively speaking, deemed to fall within the concept of scientific dishonesty" (see *Nature* 421,

201; 2003). The assessment was widely criticized, partly because it relied on existing critiques in popular science magazines.

The Danish science ministry decided to review the committees' decision, and on 16 December asked the committees to repeat the investigation. The ministry said that the committees had failed to document exactly why Lomborg was guilty.

The same government appointed Lomborg to his current position as head of the Environmental Assessment Institute in Copenhagen in 2002.

Prospects dimmed for glowing cell markers

San Diego 'Quantum dots' — tiny particles of metal or semiconductor hailed as a groundbreaking new material for labelling cells — could turn out to be toxic to the very cells they are being used to tag.

Nanometre-sized dots of cadmium selenide emit visible light when exposed to ultraviolet radiation, making them ideal for labelling cells (see *Nature* 413, 450–452; 2001). But Austin Derfus and his colleagues at the University of California, San Diego, have found that the dots damage cells under certain conditions (A. M. Derfus *et al.* *Nano Lett.* doi:10.1021/nl0347334).

Oxidation of the dots' surface, by

exposure to ultraviolet light, for example, leads to the release of toxic cadmium ions. Although the researchers say that surface coatings can help to reduce toxicity, they warn that this may not prevent cell damage in longer cell-labelling experiments.

Fusion reactor to stay homeless until New Year

Washington The decision on where to host ITER — a US\$5-billion experimental fusion reactor — has been postponed until February.

Some physicists expected a final site to be selected at a conference on 20 December near Washington DC. But it became apparent at the meeting that the two candidate sites, in France and Japan, were in for a close fight.

The United States supported the Japanese site in the northern province of Rokkasho, whereas Russia and China supported the European Union's proposed venue in Cadarache, France. South Korea eventually gave its support to the Japanese site, leaving the six project members equally split.

Negotiators said that they will continue to work towards an agreement that will satisfy all partners. One proposed solution is to construct the reactor at one site, while building a computer-modelling centre, an advanced materials laboratory and a remote control-room for the project at the other.

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Bjørn Lomborg: dishonesty claims criticized.