

Animal-rights groups take legal action to block primate centre

London Plans by the University of Cambridge to build a centre for brain research on primates face a fresh challenge, in the form of a lawsuit from two antivivisection groups.

In November, UK deputy prime minister John Prescott overruled South Cambridgeshire council's decision to refuse planning permission for the proposed Centre for Behavioural Neuroscience (see *Nature* **426**, 376; 2003). But Animal Aid and the National Anti-Vivisection Society are now challenging Prescott's ruling in the High Court. The groups point out that an independent planning inspector found that the university had failed to demonstrate that there was a "national need" for the lab.

The centre, first proposed in 1998, has become a flashpoint for Britain's bitter debate over animal experimentation. Over the lengthy planning process, the projected costs have risen by some £8 million (US\$14 million) to £32 million — giving the university authorities a headache even if the latest legal challenge proves unsuccessful. A university spokesman says that discussions with funding bodies, including the Medical Research Council and the Wellcome Trust, a research-funding charity, are continuing.

Japan agrees to hand over espionage suspect

Tokyo Japan is set to extradite a molecular biologist to the United States nearly three years after Washington charged him with stealing genetic research material, Japanese newspapers reported last week.

The Japanese justice minister, Daizo Nozawa, will begin procedures this month to transfer Takashi Okamoto, indicted on industrial-espionage charges in May 2001,



A Japanese researcher allegedly stole genetic material from the Cleveland Clinic Foundation.

Russia drops spy charge

Moscow A jury in Siberia last week acquitted physicist Valentin Danilov (pictured) of charges of spying for China. Danilov — previously a professor at Krasnoyarsk State Technical University — had spent 19 months in jail after being accused by the Federal Security Service (FSB) of selling classified space-technology information to China (see *Nature* **424**, 477; 2003). Danilov's defence, publicly supported by prominent physicists including 2003 Nobel laureate Vitaly Ginzburg, was that the information came from open sources, including published journals.

Danilov's trial is one of a series brought against researchers by the FSB. Trial by jury is currently a rarity in Russia having been used in only 9 of the nation's 89 regions in the past ten years.



to the United States, according to the newspapers *Yomiuri Shimbun* and *Kyodo News*. The Tokyo High Court is expected to approve Okamoto's extradition after a two-month examination of the case.

Okamoto, a former laboratory team leader at the Institute of Physical and Chemical Research, or RIKEN, in Japan, was charged with violating the US 1996 Economic Espionage Act, which targets the theft of commercially valuable trade secrets to benefit a foreign government — the first time that the United States has invoked the relevant clause in the act. The charges came after the Cleveland Clinic Foundation in Ohio, where Okamoto studied Alzheimer's disease before returning to Japan in 1999, alleged that he had stolen DNA samples and cell lines. Economic espionage charges carry a stiff penalty of up to 15 years in prison, \$500,000 in fines, or both.

Stem-cell centres get green light in Spain

Munich Spain is to boost its commitment to research on human stem cells — an unusual move for a predominantly Roman Catholic country — by creating two centres to bolster research in regenerative medicine.

One facility, a National Center for Organ and Tissue Transplant and Regenerative Medicine, will be based in either Madrid or Barcelona, and will be networked with smaller centres throughout Spain.

The second, based in San Sebastian, will provide one of the world's largest zebrafish facilities for screening small molecules and potential drugs. Researchers will also use the fish to try to work out the genetic basis of tissue regeneration. "Zebrafish are unusual in that some tissues, like the heart, can regenerate if damaged," says Juan Carlos Izpisua Belmonte, a gene-expression expert at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies in La Jolla, California, who will head the centre.

The centres' backers say that they will supplement Spain's modest capability in fundamental stem-cell research.

Indian rocket to launch collaboration with Israel

New Delhi India will put a US\$14-million Israeli astronomical payload into space in 2005, in a sign of growing scientific collaboration between the two nations.

The Israeli payload, named TAUVEV (Tel Aviv University Ultra Violet Experiment), consists of three wide-field ultraviolet telescopes that will be used to study black holes and the formation of stars.

The deal was signed in Bangalore on 25 December by G. Madhavan Nair, chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), and his Israeli counterpart, Aby Har-Even. Israel turned to India after an initial deal with Russia fell through. ISRO officials said that TAUVEV will ride piggy-back with ISRO's own communications payload on the geostationary satellite GSAT-4, scheduled for launch in September 2005.

Israeli science minister Eliezer Sandberg also said that Israel may participate in India's planned mission to the Moon in 2008.

Institute opens door on self-organizing systems

Munich The new year sees the launch of the Frankfurt Institute for Advanced Studies (FIAS) — an independent centre for basic multidisciplinary research into complex systems.

The FIAS, based at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University in Frankfurt, will give biologists, neuroscientists, physicists, chemists and computer scientists the chance to conduct research on self-organizing systems. The first visiting fellows will be selected in the next few months from about 70 applicants, many of whom are from Russia and eastern Europe.

Wolf Singer, director of the Max Planck Institute for Brain Research in Frankfurt, and a founding director of the new institute, says that it will study the self-organizing principles behind complex systems, and the conceptual similarities between them.