

## Live anthrax bacteria inadvertently sent to vaccine researchers

**San Francisco** A batch of live anthrax seems to have slipped through several tests that should have ensured the bacteria were dead. The tests were done both by the company that supplied the anthrax and by the lab that used it to make a trial vaccine.

The bacteria (*Bacillus anthracis*) were thought to be dead following supposed heat inactivation and tests showing that they did not grow in culture. Researchers at the Children's Hospital and Research Center at Oakland in California then used the bacteria to create an anthrax vaccine. The bacteria were discovered to be alive when 49 of 50 mice inoculated with them quickly died. Seven people at the lab have been put on a precautionary course of antibiotics.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Georgia, and the supplier — the Southern Research Institute in Birmingham, Alabama — are investigating. The California Department of Health Services says that there is no risk to anyone else in the research building or in the surrounding community.



Under fire: Valentin Danilov faces a retrial over accusations that he passed secrets to China.

## Retrial ordered for Russian physicist accused of spying

**Moscow** The Russian Supreme Court has overturned the acquittal of a Russian physicist accused of spying.

Valentin Danilov, a physicist formerly at Krasnoyarsk State Technical University in Siberia, was arrested in 2001 for allegedly supplying a Chinese company with classified satellite-technology information (see *Nature* 424, 477; 2003). He was found not guilty in December 2003. But on 9 June the high court ruled that Danilov's attorneys had improperly influenced the jury, and overturned the decision. His retrial has yet to be scheduled.

## Kangaroo genome gears up for giant leap

**Sydney** Australia's wildlife is to get its day in the sun, after the kangaroo lost out to the opossum last year as the first marsupial to have its genome sequenced (see *Nature* 425, 753; 2003).

The US National Human Genome Research Institute last week announced a partnership with the Australian Genome Research Facility to sequence the tammar wallaby (*Macropus eugenii*, right), a small kangaroo whose genome is roughly the same size as that of a human. The project, beginning this year, should take about two years to complete.

"The evolutionary distance between opossum and wallaby is as great as that between human and mouse," says Jenny Graves, a marsupial geneticist at the Australian National University in Canberra, who led the push to have the kangaroo genome sequenced. Comparing the two should provide a wealth of information, she says.



Eminent scientists in Russia support Danilov's claim that the information he allegedly passed on was not secret, and say the case is part of a witch-hunt against scientists by the Federal Security Service, the main successor to the Soviet KGB. "They are fabricating an abomination against this person," says Vitaly Ginzburg, winner of the 2003 Nobel Prize in Physics.

## Physicist Schön stripped of doctorate

**Munich** The University of Constance in Germany has withdrawn the PhD of Jan Hendrik Schön, the German physicist who fabricated data in 16 high-profile papers produced during his stay at Bell Laboratories in Murray Hill, New Jersey.

The university awarded Schön his PhD in 1997 for his work on semiconductor systems for use as solar cells. After he was found guilty of scientific fraud in 2002 (see *Nature* 419, 419–421; 2002), the university carried out an investigation of his earlier research in Germany, which was found to be free of misconduct.

But the university has now used a law that allows a PhD to be withdrawn if its holder behaves in an "undignified" manner. "Schön has violated the dignity of the doctorate, and thus damaged the credibility of science in public," says Wolfgang Dieterich, a physicist in charge of PhD awards at the university. Schön has one month to appeal the decision.

## Radiation monitor gives early warning of pest attack

**Tokyo** Japan is turning its system for monitoring nuclear radiation on insects.

In the wake of the Chernobyl disaster, the Japan Atomic Energy Research Institute developed computer programs to model the

diffusion of radioactive substances. But researchers soon realized that the simulations could be used to model any number of things blowing in the wind, including volcanic ash — and the brown planthopper (*Nilaparvata lugens*). This tiny enemy of the rice farmer blows over from southern China during June and July. The 4-millimetre-long insect sucks the sap out of rice stems and can cause complete crop loss.

Starting this year, with help from researchers at the National Agriculture and Bio-oriented Research Organization in Tsukuba, the program will use wind and temperature data from global weather forecasts to predict up to two days in advance where and when the insects will land in Japan. Farmers can then use these predictions to limit their use of pesticides.

## Hospital names head of breast cancer institute

**Washington** Cancer biologist Tak Mak has been made head of a new breast-cancer centre at the Princess Margaret Hospital in Toronto, Canada.

The Institute for Breast Cancer Research, which will initially house 12 faculty members, will work on all stages of cancer drug discovery, from target identification to clinical trials. It has a start-up fund of Can\$60 million (US\$44 million) in private and government money, and administrators hope to raise another Can\$65 million over the next five years, Mak says.

Mak was previously director of the Amgen Institute — a mouse genetics screening facility at the University of Toronto. Amgen withdrew funding from this venture two years ago (see *Nature* 417, 4; 2002), at which point Mak became director of the Advanced Medical Discovery Institute at the university. He will retain this position.