

IOM and Soviet Academy Sign First Exchange Pact

Biomedical research is the latest beneficiary of *glasnost*. On 15 January in Moscow, a 5-year agreement was signed by the new president of the Soviet Academy of Medical Sciences Valentin Pokrovskiy and Institute of Medicine (IOM) president Samuel Thier. It is the first exchange agreement between the two organizations. The IOM is a branch of the National Academy of Sciences.

In the past, a modest number of exchanges in biomedicine have taken place under the auspices of the National Institutes of Health and its Soviet counterpart. The new agreement opens the door for more exchanges.

Each side will host visiting researchers for periods totaling 12 months. For example, 12 scientists could visit for 1 month each over the course of a year. The Soviet academy and the IOM will have the right to disapprove a candidate for the exchanges. This is to ensure that leading Soviet scientists participate, which has not always been the case in past exchanges under the sponsorship of the National Academy of Sciences. Soviet and U.S. delegations plan to meet once a year to select topics to be studied.

The two sides also agreed to host an unspecified number of joint workshops that would involve about 10 participants from each country. As part of the agreement, the organizations plan to sponsor a workshop on vaccine development in April in the Soviet Union. Topics for additional workshops and joint research are currently being negotiated, says Thier. ■ M.S.

DOE Backs NAS Choices for Super Collider Site

The secretary of the Department of Energy, John Herrington, is endorsing the National Academy of Sciences' list of candidate sites for the Superconducting Super Collider (SSC). Herrington was under pressure from California, Mississippi, Ohio, and other states to add names to academy's list (*Science*, 8 January, p. 133).

Herrington's affirmation of the academy choices, however, has not dissipated the controversy surrounding the selection of finalists. The House Science, Space, and Technology Committee may hold hearings on DOE's site selection process in mid-February or early March. Both DOE and the National Academy of Sciences could be

asked how they arrived at the final list of sites, which included Arizona, Colorado, Illinois, New York, North Carolina, Michigan, Tennessee, and Texas. New York has since withdrawn its site proposal because of local opposition.

DOE had been instructed by Congress to give preferential consideration to Nevada as a potential site for the SSC. This order accompanied a provision in the 1988 budget reconciliation bill that named Nevada as the location for the nation's high-level nuclear waste disposal facility. But Herrington told reporters on 19 January that while Nevada's proposal was considered it was not chosen as a finalist because it did not meet all of the department's criteria.

Meanwhile, it appears that the White House will ask Congress to provide \$363 million, not \$100 million as previously reported, for the SSC in fiscal year 1989. In anticipation of expanded congressional funding for the project, a group of companies have formed an informal organization, the Superconducting Super Collider Industry Group, to support the undertaking. Members include: General Dynamics, General Electric, Grumman, Air Products, Tele-dyne, Westinghouse, Union Carbide, Brown Boveri, GA Technologies, Bechtel, and about 40 other participants. ■ M.C.

NAS Delegation Asks Somalis to Free 13

One of the first human rights delegations ever permitted to visit Somalia has called for the release of 13 Somali scientists who have been political prisoners for more than 5 years. Five of them, arrested for criticizing the government, are scheduled to go on trial on 2 February.

The four-member delegation from the National Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Medicine took a fact-finding trip to Somalia last October. Somalia, an extremely poor nation of 5.7 million, was created in 1960. Major General Mohamed Siad Barre took over in a military coup in 1969. The country, which has been engaged in long-running hostilities with Ethiopia, has received several hundred million dollars in economic and security assistance from the United States since 1980.

The group's report, "Scientists and Human Rights in Somalia," details what sounds like a typical Third World encounter. The trip was finally arranged after 4 years of mostly unanswered letters to Somali officials. A date with the ambassador in Washington fell through when it was discovered he was not in the country. The

Somalis tried to cancel the trip at the last minute because it coincided with anniversary celebrations of the revolution. Hoped-for appointments with high officials failed to take place, and meetings with officials of two ministries produced no information. Visitors were not allowed to meet with the prisoners. The delegation failed to get information on allegations that prisoners have been tortured, but evidence of torture has been found by American doctors who have examined former Somali prisoners.

The report observes that "there is serious question about the commitment of the government of Somalia to respect for human rights." However, Eliot Stellar, chairman of the NAS Human Rights Committee, pointed out that "unlike many other countries" the government "did respond to one of the committee's enquiries" and did permit the visit. ■ C.H.

Animal Stealer Convicted

In the first case of its kind, an individual involved in stealing research animals has been tried and convicted for the offense. Roger Troen, a 28-year-old graphics designer from Portland, Oregon, was convicted of theft and burglary on 21 January for participation in a break-in at the University of Oregon.

The raiders, from the Animal Liberation Front, broke into the animal facilities at the university's psychology department in October 1986. They smashed equipment, and made off with 150 cats, rabbits, pigeons, and rats, according to the university. Losses are estimated at about \$35,000.

It took two police officers working full time for 2 months to break the case. They were led to Troen when a woman reported that he had given her \$5 to care for three rabbits.

According to a university spokesperson, Gaye Vandermyn, authorities encountered "a lot of empathy" from local citizens after four albino rabbits in poor shape were found abandoned in a park. The local branch of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA)—which acts as mouthpiece for the anonymous liberation front—claimed they had been planted there by the university but the tattoos on the animals' ears indicated they were among those that had been stolen.

At Troen's trial, his attorney got permission from the judge to use a novel defense claiming that stealing the animals was the "lesser of evils." The judge did not buy the argument though, and the defendant ended up pleading guilty. Sentencing is set for 10 March. ■ C.H.