

which lost out to Cassini in the competition, have been developed primarily by France's National Center for Space Studies (CNES) and the Soviet space agency Intercosmos, and are intended as a follow-up both to the ESA's successful flyby of the comet Halley, and the Soviet-launched Vega spacecraft.

A major participation by ESA in Vesta had been heavily championed by CNES and its director-general, Frédéric d'Allest, who is keen to strengthen still further the close ties that have existed for over 20 years between the French and Soviet space programs.

President François Mitterrand, visiting the Soviet space center at Baikonour on 28 November to watch the departure of the French astronaut Jean-Loup Chrétien on board the Soyuz TM-7, for example, announced that closer cooperation in space activities had been a central topic of his discussions with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

The two countries have confirmed earlier proposals to mount a joint mission to Mars. And the Vesta mission is still planned to go ahead, but now essentially on a bilateral basis—with, it is expected, the Soviets now picking up the largest share of the bill.

■ DAVID DICKSON

Galeev to Head Space Research Institute

Scientists at the Soviet Academy of Science's Space Research Institute (IKI), which is the dominant player in that country's program of space science and planetary exploration, have elected a new director: Alec Galeev, the former head of IKI's plasma physics division. Galeev succeeds Roald Sagdeev, whose 14-year tenure as director made him one of the most powerful and influential scientists in the Soviet Union.

Galeev has been a protégé and colleague of Sagdeev's since they first worked together at the Siberian science city of Novosibirsk, some two decades ago. However, the succession was by no means automatic. The same Academy reforms that now limit institute directors to two 5-year terms, and that led to Sagdeev's stepping down this past summer, also call for new directors to be elected by the members of their institutes.

Galeev accordingly had to run against at least two other candidates in an open election campaign. He emerged victorious in September, although outside observers are not certain what his vote margin was. His appointment was officially confirmed by the Academy in October. He has also been made a corresponding member of the Academy.

The 55-year-old Sagdeev, meanwhile, is still working at IKI. He expects to be chief scientist on the Soviets' Mars 1994 mission, which will explore the surface of that planet with unmanned rovers and balloons. He is active in the International Foundation for the Survival and Development of Humanity, a new organization devoted to issues of peace and the environment. And he is said to be looking into the possibility of setting up a new institute to look at arms control from a scientific perspective.

■ M. MITCHELL WALDROP

Superconductor Rumor

A rumor of the discovery of a new high-temperature superconductor was heating up the superconductivity community this past week, but as *Science* went to press there was no substantiation.

According to the rumor, which was reported by a number of superconductivity researchers, workers at a U.S. laboratory have fabricated a material that becomes superconducting at 200 K or above, much higher than the current record of 125 K. Some versions of the rumor had the critical temperature as high as room temperature or about 300 K.

People who heard the rumor said that President Reagan is supposed to hold a news conference to announce the discovery sometime before Christmas, perhaps as early as the second week of December. Because of the President's alleged role in announcing the discovery, most people guessed that the supposed discovery took place at a government laboratory, but the rumor was not clear on this point.

Researchers at government labs who were contacted by *Science* said they had no knowledge of the discovery, although some had heard the rumor. Roger Poeppel, head of ceramics processing at Argonne National Laboratory, had a typical response: "Nobody that I know knows anything about it."

■ ROBERT POOL

Germany Drafting Biotechnology Law

Bonn

The West German government is preparing legislation that would turn voluntary guidelines governing research involving recombinant DNA into a set of legally binding regulations. The law, which should be drafted by next spring, will also give state governments a role in implementing the regulations.

The law is being drafted by the Ministry of Health in response to a directive issued last week by the West German cabinet. The regulations will define "levels of danger" for different types of experiments, and, according to Health Ministry spokesman Gernot Schubert, approval of experiments will depend on "how facilities are constructed, what equipment is used and who is doing the research."

Most experiments conducted in so-called "contained areas" will be approved by individual German states, but approval of "high-risk" biotechnological experiments will be a matter of national government scrutiny.

The release of genetically manipulated organisms into the environment will only be permitted after a "state commission" has determined that all "dangers for humans and environment" can be excluded according to "current scientific knowledge." Government approval in some cases will place additional conditions on experimentation.

The process of approving biotechnological experiments is expected to be difficult and complex. But, according to Schubert, the new law will allow flexibility to decide from case to case and rely on "expert evaluation."

■ DON KIRK

Don Kirk is a free-lance writer based in Bonn.

Jim Watson on the Budget

With budget deficits and major new weapons systems the focus of political attention in the nation's capital these days, Nobel laureate James D. Watson, director of the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, has come to the defense of basic biological research with his well-known directness.

The budget for the National Institutes of Health "must be approximately doubled in real terms by the year 2000," Watson writes in his annual report for the lab. Where will the increase come from? Easy. "The monies can and should come from the bloated military-industrial complex, which increasingly is producing weapons that either do not work as promised or have costs totally incomparable with any addition they may give to true national security."

Not surprisingly, Watson sees gold in DNA and rejects the notion that the science budget is inevitably a zero sum game. "If we do not rise to the occasion and do the science that can be done today, then other nations, particularly those in the Orient, will fill the vacuum. . . . The aspirations of the youth of Singapore, for example, will not be limited to the assembly of Apple computers. . . ."

■ BARBARA J. CULLITON