

Briefings

edited by CONSTANCE HOLDEN

Japan Acts on Elephants, Dolphins

Japan tried to spruce up its environmental image last week when it announced it is suspending virtually all ivory imports until the end of the year.

The announcement came just a few days before U.S. public television was scheduled to air an hour-long documentary, "Ivory Wars," which describes the destruction of African elephants to supply mainly Japan with jewelry and curios. It also precedes by a few weeks an international endangered species conference to be held in Switzerland. Japan's decision on whether to make its temporary ban permanent will depend on the outcome of the meeting, according to a Japanese embassy official.

Anthropologist Richard Leakey, now director of Kenya's Wildlife Commission, told *Science*, "If Japan stops importing ivory, the elephants can start dancing."

In the same announcement, the Japanese also said they were cutting back on the number of boats—from 60 to 20—using controversial 40-kilometer-long fishing nets. Sometimes called "walls of death," the fine-meshed nets result in the killing of dolphins as well as other non-commercial species.

Psychiatrists Oppose Soviets

The American Psychiatric Association has issued a resounding "no" to the question of whether the official Soviet psychiatric body should be re-admitted to the World Psychiatric Association. The APA plans to lobby hard for its stand when the WPA meets 11 to 19 October

in Athens. The Soviet All-Union Society of Neuropathologists and Psychiatrists resigned from the world body in 1983 amid allegations over political abuses of psychiatry.

Ellen Mercer, APA's director of international affairs, says her group will not oppose allowing the Soviets to retain their present probationary status in the world organization. The group, however, will try to pass a resolution that would prevent the Soviet society from regaining full status until "the authorities have dissociated themselves from past abuses, . . . taken effective action to prevent their repetition, and [released] individuals detained in psychiatric hospitals for reasons other than mental illness as defined by [widely accepted professional standards]."

Britain, Switzerland, Australia, New Zealand, and West Germany will vote against full membership for the All-Union Society, according to Mercer.

Goskompriroda and Glasnost

The chief of the Soviet Union's new state environment committee has quit, apparently disgusted and disillusioned, after only 15 months on the job.

When respected agronomist Fyodor Morgun, 65, became head of Goskompriroda, the Soviet State Committee for Environmental Protection, he took *glasnost* to heart and proclaimed his country was in "ecological crisis." His candor startled comrades and foreigners alike (*Science*, 26 August 1988, p. 1033).

In a parting interview published in *Pravda*, Morgun described his frustrations over his country's senseless abuse of the environment. While the public has become aroused over the tremendous pollution problems, he said, the nation is still pushing to



John Silber

BU Takes Over School District

Can Boston University show the world how to shape up public education? Starting this month, it will get an unprecedented opportunity. The city of Chelsea, near Boston, has thrown up its hands and turned its entire school system over to BU, which will have complete authority to run the schools for 10 years.

The unique social experiment was initiated by BU's outspoken, neoconservative-minded president John Silber, who wants to make of Chelsea "a model for the nation." The job won't be easy: Chelsea, a declining city with a population of 26,000, has the highest drop-out and teen pregnancy rates in the state, and family income is 43% below the state norm.

BU is bringing in its own management team, and plans are to operate the schools year-round. Preschool and "after school" programs will eventually be added. Schools will also provide adult literacy and infant nutrition programs, day care, and mentors for single-parent children. Salaries for teachers will be raised and bad instructors will be weeded out. The curriculum for the entire school system is to be overhauled, and every student will be evaluated and given an "individual learning plan."

Many of the plans for the school system will depend on the private university's success in steadily raising funds to pump up spending for school programs from \$16 million to \$22 million a year. Silber also has two lawsuits to contend with—from the teachers' union and a group of Hispanic parents who fear the loss of public control of the schools. But those will be the least of his challenges.

increase productivity—like boosting car production while ignoring emissions. So the committee is always "caught between a rock and a hard place."

The state has wasted billions of rubles on projects that are not only environmentally destructive but inane, said Morgun, citing a 10-year program to build processing plants for obtaining protein from petroleum products. This project was futile from the beginning, he said, but it even had backing from the Soviet Academy of Sciences. Morgun railed against the project after he became environment chief but found himself in the "depressing minority." He did eventually succeed in halting further construction.

Morgun said that until capital is available to replace old technology, the country must

restrain the development of new, polluting industries. Pursuing economic development while minimizing environmental damage, said the former environment chief, "takes intelligence and ecological culture. We have almost none of either of these. . . . Much is the result of stupidity, ignorance, slovenliness, a lack of elementary knowledge, and the habit of putting everything off until later. We must learn."

If the environment committee is going to make a difference, said Morgun, its chief must be elevated to the Council of Ministers or the Supreme Soviet. "I am convinced that sooner or later this will have to happen." This may depend on the political skills of Morgun's successor, biologist and non-party member Nikolai Vorontsov.