

SCIENCE

Storm Clouds Over Russian Science

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A Special Report



This special report on science in Russia is based on interviews conducted in Russia in fall 1993 and spring 1994, discussions with expatriate Russian scientists and Western science policy experts, and interviews conducted long-distance by telephone, fax, and e-mail. The reporting turned out to be challenging. The first problem was simply making contact: Communication with Russia is still a dirt track compared to the information superhighway. Dozens of faxes and e-mail messages to set up interviews would only draw one or two responses, usually along the lines of "You are welcome any time." In the end, assistance from Russian scientists in arranging interviews proved invaluable.

The first trip to Russia did not begin auspiciously. While European Correspondent Peter Aldhous was in the air on his way to Moscow last September, President Boris Yeltsin dissolved the Soviet-era parliament that was obstructing his reforms. This first 2-week round of interviews was conducted against the background of a tense stand-off between Yeltsin and his hard-line opponents. And a planned trip to Novosibirsk in Siberia had to be called off when the flight was delayed for 3 days due to lack of fuel. By the time of our second visits in March, things were calmer. The press was no longer dominated by political strife but by the marriage of Russia's most celebrated pop diva to a protégé half her age. After interviews with scores of scientists at dozens of institutes, we came away with a lasting impression of the dignity with which most Russians are coping with their current plight.

—Daniel Clery, Peter Aldhous

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